



A Byzantine Rite  
Liturgical Year



**A BYZANTINE RITE  
LITURGICAL YEAR**







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**JULIAN J. KATRIJ, OSBM**

**A BYZANTINE RITE  
LITURGICAL YEAR**

translated by  
Fr. Demetrius E. Wysochansky, OSBM

**Part I**

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## Foreword

*"Many people celebrate the feasts  
and know their names, but  
do not know why they were instituted."  
St. John Chrysostom*

*The Second Vatican Council in its decrees speaks about the treasure of tradition of the Eastern Churches and their Rites not only with great respect, but also recommends and commands us to foster and conserve this sacred tradition and, where it is forgotten, to revive it.*

*This is emphasized in a special way in the decrees "On the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite" and "On Ecumenism".*

*"Each and every Catholic," — we read in the decree "On Eastern Catholic Churches", — "as also the baptized of every non-Catholic church or denomination who enters into the fullness of the Catholic communion, must retain his own rite wherever he is, must cherish it and observe it to the best of his ability" (4).*

*In the decree "On Ecumenism" the Council says: "The very rich liturgical and spiritual heritage of the Eastern Churches should be known, venerated, preserved and cherished by all. They must recognize that this is of supreme importance for the faithful preservation of the fullness of Christian tradition, and for bringing about reconciliation between Eastern and Western Christians" (15).*

*The Basilian Fathers having in mind this command and wish of the Council place in your hands a remarkable book entitled "A Byzantine Rite Liturgical Year" written by Fr. Julian J. Katrij, OSBM.*

*This book provides a key to the sacred treasure of the tradition, customs and liturgical rites of one of the Eastern-Slavonic Churches.*

*The above mentioned book was published a few years ago in the Ukrainian language and had already two editions; now it appears in English, translated by Fr. Demetrius E. Wysochansky, OSBM.*

*The individual themes in this book are examined from the standpoint of history, liturgy, symbolism, asceticism, and even, when appropriate, Ukrainian folklore. In every respect the work of Fr. Julian J. Katrij presents a complete and well-rounded picture of the Liturgical Year of the Ukrainian Catholic Church.*

*This work takes on special significance when we consider the circumstances of the life of our Ukrainian people in settlements in various foreign countries, where they have little or no opportunity to educate their youth in the spirit of their liturgical traditions. These are being more and more neglected not because of ill will, but simply because of ignorance.*

*We are convinced therefore that this book will become an inseparable companion for our clergy, religious and laity, who cherish their Rite and wish to deepen their knowledge of it.*

*Basilian Fathers Publication*

## Translator's Note

*This translation was inspired by the exceptional merits of the book itself. To my knowledge there is in English no work which so combines the desirable qualities of completeness, order, clarity and brevity.*

*Although the author treats the Liturgical Year from a specifically Ukrainian perspective, mentioning, for example, religious practices from Ukrainian customs and folklore, this work maintains, nonetheless, its universal value by the fact that it treats basically that matter which is common to all Byzantine Churches, Catholic and Orthodox.*

*May the reader of this book be not only enlightened but also inspired to a deeper relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ through the study of the Liturgical Year.*





## Acknowledgements

*The translator wishes to thank the following people who contributed to making this book a reality: Rev. Sebastian Sabol, OSBM, Very Reverend Provincial Julian J. Katrij, OSBM, Sister Priscilla Snell, O.P., of the Adrian Dominican Sisters, Olga Wojtyshyn, Myrosia Stefaniuk, and last but not least my mother, Anelia Wysochansky, now 92 years old and mother of 4 priests and grandmother of one priest, who also contributed to the realization of this book by her prayers and encouragement.*





## Our Liturgical Year

*"O Author of all created things,  
Who has established the seasons  
and the years, bless the crown  
of the year with your goodness,  
O Lord." (Troparion of the Indiction)*

Our Eastern Rite is a priceless heritage and treasure of the Eastern Church and our Ukrainian people. It is noted for its venerable antiquity, its profound content, its mysticism, symbolism, and magnificent liturgical ceremonies. Developed by the greatest and most gifted of the faithful of the Eastern Church of different ages, countries and peoples, it has been sanctified by the prayers, tears, and sacrifices of the saints, as well as by the blood of martyrs. Our Rite, a faithful reflection of our holy faith, beautifully harmonizes with the soul, mentality and character of our people.

An integral part of our Rite and its most beautiful expression is the Liturgical Year. It resembles a grand panorama in which we find painted in radiant and vivid colors the whole history of man's redemption. During the Liturgical Year we have the opportunity to meditate upon and relive the glorious mysteries and events in the life of Jesus Christ and his most

Holy Mother. It places before us, for our admiration and imitation, the heroic deeds and virtues of an immense throng of saints, martyrs and holy people. The Liturgical Year calls us to experience days of spiritual joy, jubilation and triumph as well as days of fasting, penance and holy sorrow for our sins.

For many long centuries our Rite has preserved our Church and people in our native land. It can do the same for us and our children now in the various settlements throughout the world. Obviously, therefore, we should not only know our Rite, cherish it and live according to its precepts, but also we should bring up our children in such a manner that they too will know and cherish it.

With this in mind, we wish to present in this book, "A Byzantine Rite Liturgical Year", a series of outlines of the history, meaning, content, and practices of our Liturgical Year. We shall begin by considering our Liturgical Year in general.

### **What is the Liturgical Year?**

In a pastoral letter issued at the close of the Second Vatican Council (1965), our Bishops, together with Major Archbishop Cardinal Joseph Slipyj, defined the Liturgical Year as: "A liturgical cycle of the Universal or some particular Church, that consists of Sundays, weekdays, the feasts of our Lord, the Mother of God, the saints and the periods of fasting and forbidden times."

We call the Liturgical Year the Ecclesiastical or Church Year, because it contains the Church Calendar, which in some respects is similar to and in others differs from the civil calendar. In the Eastern Church the Church Year differs from the civil calendar in that it does not begin the New Year with the first of January as does the civil year, but begins it with the first day of September, which is called the Beginning of the Indiction. This means that the whole cycle of our Church Year begins with the first of September and ends with the thirty first of the following August.

### **What is Meant by Indiction?**

The word "indiction" comes from the Latin word "indictio", which literally means "institution, proclamation, appeal, announcement." The "indiction" was an edict of the



Roman Emperors used to determine the land tax throughout the Roman Empire. Such edicts began to appear during the reign of Diocletian (284-305) in the year 297 A.D. At first, they were issued every five years, then later every fifteen years. Gradually the word "indiction" came to denote not only an imperial proclamation, but also a fifteen year cycle as well as the first day of this cycle. Originally, the indiction was used exclusively for fiscal and tax purposes. But slowly it began to be used in determining the various dates of civil life. This fiscal year did not coincide with the astronomical year which, since the reform of Julius Caesar in the year 46 to the coming of Christ, began with the first day of January. The first day of the indiction was originally the twenty-third of September because that was the day on which Caesar Augustus was born, but under Constantine the Great (306-337) it was the first day of September.

### **The Beginning of the Indiction — The New Liturgical Year**

The Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea in the year 325 adopted the first of September as the opening of the New Church Year and this day has been observed in the Eastern Church to the present time. The Latin Church opens its Liturgical Year on the first day of Advent, i.e., the beginning of the preparation for Christmas.

The indiction of which we are speaking — for there were other indictions — is called the Byzantine (or Constantinopolitan or also the Constantinian) indiction which, except for Egypt, became mandatory throughout the Roman Empire. Justinian I (527-565) made dating by indiction compulsory for all legal documents. The Roman Church during the reign of Pope Pelagius II (579-590) adopted the indiction for establishing the dates of documents, and this practice was not abandoned until the year 1097.

### **The Beginning of the Indiction — A Church Feast**

Later, when the first day of September was designated as the beginning of the Church Year, or as it was called in the Church Calendar, the beginning of the "New Year", it as-

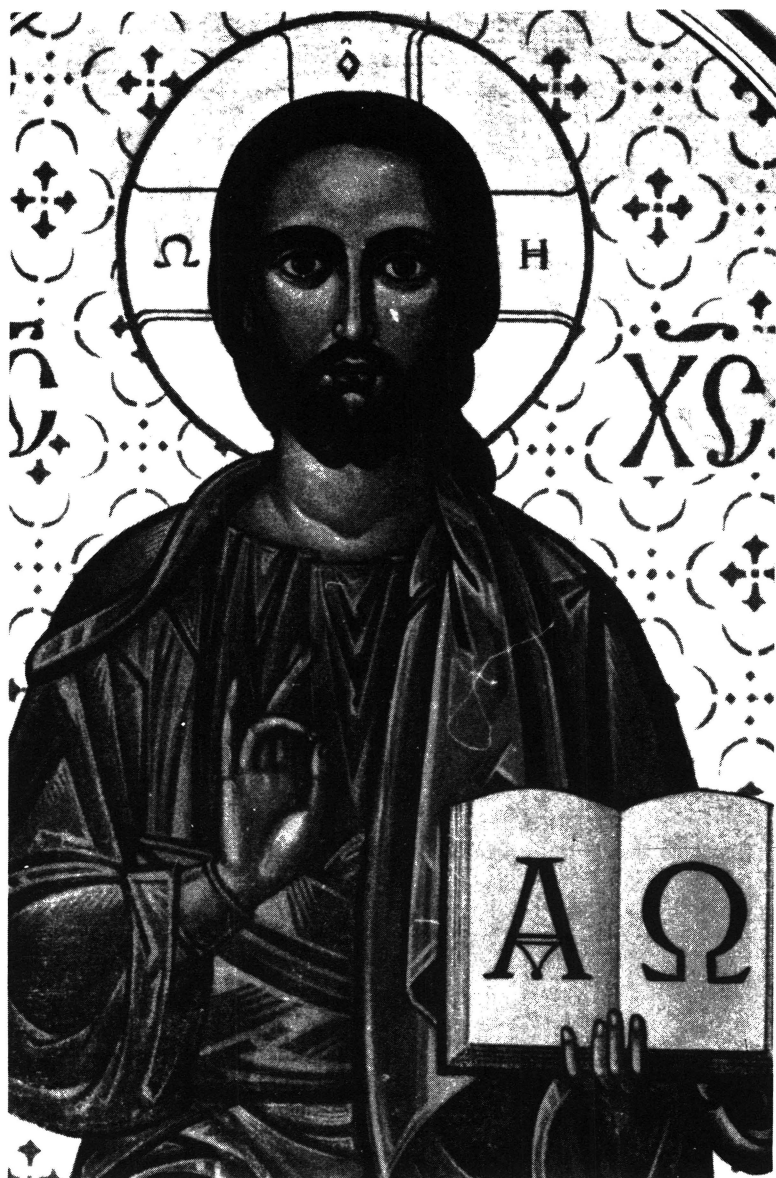
**sumed a religious character and became a feast of the Church, i.e., a day which had its own special liturgical service. On this day our Church commemorates the day on which Christ entered the synagogue in Nazareth and read from the scrolls the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord has been given me, for He anointed me... to proclaim the Lord's year of favor." (Luke 4,18-19) No reliable evidence exists to indicate when the beginning of the Indiction became a feast of the Church; we do know, however, that it already existed in the eighth century.**

### **The Character and Content of the Liturgical Year**

The Liturgical Year is so arranged that its central place is occupied by our Divine Saviour; around him are gathered all the angels and saints. In the decree of the Second Vatican Council on the "Constitution on the Liturgy" we read: "Holy Mother Church is conscious that she must celebrate the saving work of her divine Spouse by devoutly recalling it on certain days throughout the year. Every week, on the day which she has called the Lord's day, she keeps the memory of the Lord's resurrection, which she also celebrates once a year, together with His blessed passion, in the most solemn festival of Easter. Within a cycle of a year, moreover, she unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, from the incarnation and birth until the ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of blessed hope and the coming of the Lord." (§102)

The Most Pure Virgin Mary, who has been accorded the most prominent place after Christ in the work of redemption, also stands nearest to Christ in the Liturgical Year. This is evident in the various feasts in honor of the Mother of God. The decree on the "Constitution on the Liturgy" declares that: "In celebrating this annual cycle of Christ's mysteries, holy Church honors with special love the Blessed Mary, Mother of God, who is joined by an inseparable bond to the saving work of her Son. In her, the Church holds up and admires the most excellent fruit of the redemption, and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless image, that which she herself desires and hopes wholly to be." (§103)

Around the persons of our Lord Jesus Christ and His most holy Mother we see the grand choir of the Church Triumphant



*Icon by S. Hordynsky*

in heaven, that is, all the saints of the Old and New Testaments: "The Church," says the same Council, "has also included in the annual cycle days devoted to the memory of the martyrs and the other saints. Raised up to perfection by the manifold graces of God and already in possession of eternal salvation, they sing God's perfect praise in heaven and offer prayers for us." (§104)

Holy Church, like a good Mother, also commemorates during the Liturgical Year her children who have departed into eternity, and who are in purgatory. For this reason, she has designated certain special days, called "Souls Days", on which she offers prayers and special memorial services for the faithful departed. Finally, the Church Militant also dedicates special times in the Church Year in which the living are asked to engage in spiritual works, prayer, fasting and penance in order to develop their spiritual life more fully. "Finally," we read in the decree on the "Constitution on the Liturgy", "in the various seasons of the year and according to her traditional discipline, the Church completes the formation of the faithful by means of pious practices for soul and body, by instruction, prayer, and works of penance and of mercy." (§105).

In summary, our Liturgical Year is a mighty hymn of honor and glory to God, in which the threefold Church takes part — the Church Triumphant in heaven, the Church Suffering in purgatory, and the Church Militant on earth. In the Church Year, the entire content of our holy faith finds its most beautiful expression. Like a colorful rainbow our Liturgical Year joins earth to heaven, and enlightens, purifies, sanctifies and lifts us up to God.



## **Spiritual Significance of the Liturgical Year**

In the pastoral letter written by our bishops and the Archbishop Major Cardinal Joseph Slipyj at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council (1965), we read: "The Liturgical cycle of our Church is very rich. Our Liturgical Constitutions guide the faithful throughout the whole year and continuously place before their eyes the mysteries of the life, passion, death, and resurrection of our Divine Saviour, the grandeur of the Divine Motherhood and powerful intercession of the most Holy Virgin Mary, the lives of holy men and women, who by their heroic imitation of Christ glorified God and the whole human race. The seasons of fast and abstinence from boisterous entertainment are to help the faithful exercise more self-control and better prepare them for the sacramental encounter with Christ in the Holy Eucharist and that face-to-face encounter with Christ on the day of his Second Coming at the end of the world."

From what has been said, it is evident that our Liturgical Year resembles a great spiritual book that teaches us in a practical manner how to praise, love and serve God and thus save our souls. It speaks to us not only of the great love and mercy of God towards us, but also of His strict justice. This spiritual book predisposes us for prayer, sacrifice and penance.

Holy Church desires that the cycle of the Liturgical Year be for us an ever-present preacher and teacher of God's love and the love of His most holy Mother. She desires that it serve as a school of spiritual life, virtue and holiness, and that it be our sure and faithful guide to heaven. Great indeed then, is the significance of the Liturgical Year for our spiritual life, especially for the following reasons:



## **The Liturgical Year — Is Christ Living and Active**

For us the festivals of the Liturgical Year, according to the Church, should not be mere commemorations of past historical events, but should rather be opportunities, here and now, to re-live these events and participate in them as though they were just now taking place. The person of Jesus Christ in whom the whole cycle of the Ecclesiastical Year is centered is not a dead person, who once lived, worked, and passed into history. Jesus Christ is eternally alive and active. Just as he once did on earth, so he does now. He teaches and admonishes us, sanctifies and forgives us, offers Himself up for us, saves us, and draws us to Himself by His example. "Jesus Christ," says St. Paul,, "is the same today as He was yesterday and as He will be forever." (Heb. 13,8) The Liturgical Year, then, is a continuation of Christ's life, work and doctrine among us today. It is the mystical repetition of the mysteries of Christ's life in the hearts of the faithful.

In his encyclical letter of November, 1947, "Mediator of God", Pius XII wrote: "The Liturgical Year devoutly fostered and accompanied by the Church is not a cold and lifeless representation of the past, nor a simple, bare record of a former age. Rather, it is Christ Himself who is ever living in His Church. Here He continues that journey of immense mercy which He lovingly began in His mortal life 'going about doing good' with the design of bringing men to know His mysteries and in a way live by them. These mysteries are ever present and active... they are shining examples of Christian perfection as well as sources of divine grace." (§165) Similarly, the decree of the Second Vatican Council on the "Constitution on the Liturgy" states that: "Recalling thus the mysteries of redemption, the Church opens to the faithful the riches of her Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present for all times, and the faithful are enabled to lay hold upon them and become filled with saving grace." (§102)

## **The Liturgical Year — A Source of Profound Veneration of the Mother of God**

The Liturgical Year is not only a very rich source of the love of Jesus Christ, but is also a fountain of the profound

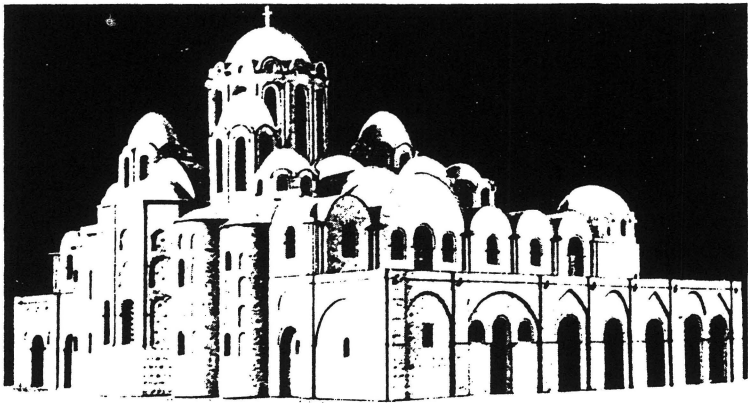


*Christ in Majesty (16th c.)*

reverence of His most holy Mother. Jesus and Mary are so closely united, that one cannot love Jesus Christ without, at the same time, loving the all-pure Virgin Mary. "Whoever honors Christ," says St. Epiphany of Cyprus (†403) "honors also Mary; whoever does not honor Mary, does not honor Christ."

The Liturgical Year gives us a wonderful opportunity to study the role and significance of the most holy Mother of God in the work of redemption, to admire her most beautiful virtues and learn to love her as our Mother, Mediatrix and Protectress. "For Mary," says the decree on the "Constitution on the Church", "who, since her entry into salvation history, unites in herself and re-echoes the greatest teachings of the faith as she is proclaimed and venerated, calls the faithful to her Son, His sacrifice and to the love of the Father... This most Holy Synod deliberately teaches this Catholic doctrine and at the same time admonishes all the sons of the Church that the cult, especially the liturgical cult, of the Blessed Virgin be fostered..." (§65 and §67)

The Liturgical Year of our Eastern Church is particularly remarkable for its profound and sincere veneration of the Mother of God, expressed in all our church services.



*Reproduction of St. Sophia Cathedral in Kiev, Ukraine,  
12th-13th century*

The eminent scholar and authority on the tradition of the Eastern Church, a Catholic priest and Prince, Maximillian of Saxony, in his "Lectures on the Eastern Liturgies", makes the following remark about the devotion to the most Pure Virgin Mary in the Eastern Church: "Above all, is the veneration of the Mother of God especially a characteristic of the Eastern Liturgies... The cult of the Mother of God in the East is ancient. All the great Marian feasts began in the East, so that devotion to Mary permeated the blood and bone of all the faithful of the Eastern Church... They were so reared in the

veneration of the Mother of God that whosoever did not venerate her was simply regarded as an unbeliever and non-Christian. Thus, for example, a well known Greek song declares, 'Those who do not kiss your holy icon, O Virgin Mother of God, consider them as infidels and deliver them over to the fires of hell.' — All the Slavic peoples, especially the Ukrainians, inherited this love for the Mother of God from the Greeks." Our Kievan Metropolitan George (1069-1072) in his canonical collection "Precepts to the Confessing Sons and Daughters" says: "He who does not pray to the holy Mother of God with trust, let him be cursed."

### **The Liturgical Year — Is the Gospel in Practice**

During the Liturgical Year, besides the festivals of our Lord and His most Pure Mother, we also celebrate the memory of the different saints. Their names fill a very great part of the Church Calendar. Every day in the year is dedicated to one or more saints. By their lives they have clearly demonstrated that they attained sanctity solely because they followed the example of Christ and His most holy Mother and lived according to the teachings of the Holy Gospel. Their example and heroic virtues speak to us in a language that is understood by all — the language of the Holy Gospel. Hence, their lives are for us the Holy Gospel in action.

Pope Pius XII in his above mentioned encyclical says: "In the course of the Liturgical Year, besides the mysteries of Jesus Christ, the feasts of the Saints are celebrated... we should imitate the virtues of the saints just as they imitated Christ, for in their virtues there shines forth under different aspects the splendor of the Divine Redeemer." (§166, §167)

The Saints by their holiness of life continually remind us of our duty to become saints — a duty we assumed by our baptismal commitment. Sanctity is not the privilege of only a few. The words of Christ apply to all of us: "Be you perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect," (Mt. 5,48); so too, do the words of the Apostle Paul: "The will of God is your sanctification." (I. Thes. 4,3)

The Second Vatican Council, in many places of its decrees, reminds all the faithful of this obligation to strive for holiness of life, for sanctity: "All the faithful, whatever their condi-

tion or state, are called by the Lord each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect... Therefore, in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness... Therefore, all the faithful of Christ are invited to strive for the holiness and perfection of their own proper state." (Constitution on the Church, §11, 39, 42)

By their own example, the saints teach us that sanctity is within the reach of people of all ages and all walks of life. All one has to do is love God, please Him in all things, and fulfill His holy will as the saints did.

Our Liturgical Year is truly a wonderful school of spiritual life. In this school we learn the simple alphabet not only of the love of God, but also of great holiness, which flows naturally from the veneration and imitation of Jesus Christ, the most Pure Virgin Mary and the saints.

The Liturgical Year, like a beautifully painted iconostas, constantly places before our eyes the sublime history of the redemption of the human race. Let us strive, therefore, to be, not mute but vocal witnesses, and active participators in the sacred events of our Liturgical Year, who exemplify these events in the actions of our daily lives.





*The Great Panagia (12th century)*

# **How Our Liturgical Year Developed**

In the Old Testament we read about the mysterious tree of life, which God had planted in the garden of Eden. Although this tree no longer exists, the Lord has planted a new tree of life in the supernatural garden of the Church. This tree flourishes before our eyes, blossoming every year with new freshness and vigor; ever-renewing itself, and bringing forth abundant fruit for eternal life, — and that mystical tree is the Liturgical Year.

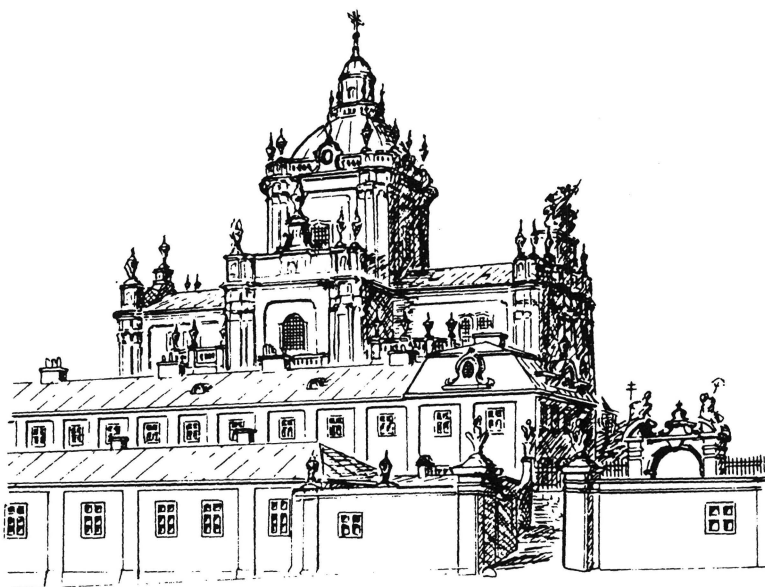
The development and growth of the Ecclesiastical Year can be aptly compared to the growth of a tree. Just as the growth of a tree begins with a small kernel, which grows imperceptibly into maturity as the years go by, so too, the development of the Ecclesiastical Year began with a mystical divine kernel — the Holy Eucharist. The upper room where the Last Supper took place was the cradle of the Ecclesiastical Year. It has grown and developed over a thousand years until it assumed its present day form.

Let us examine closely the growth of this New Testament tree — the Ecclesiastical Year which was planted by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Like in every tree, the principal parts of this tree include its root, trunk, crown and fruit.

## **The Root of the Tree of the Liturgical Year**

The root which nourishes this giant tree with its life-giving sap is our Lord's bloody sacrifice on the Cross which is renewed in an unbloody manner in every Divine Liturgy. The Eucharistic Sacrifice which is offered up at each Divine Liturgy is the soul of our Liturgical Year. "The Most Blessed Eucharist," says the Second Vatican Council, "contains the entire spiritual boon of the Church, that is, Christ Himself, our





*St. George's Cathedral (1744-64), Lviv, Ukraine  
(Drawing by George Moshinsky)*

Pasch and Living Bread, by the action of the Holy Spirit... giving life to men... No Christian community is built up, however, unless it has as its basis and center in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist." (Ministry and Life of Priests, 5, 6) The decree on the "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" states: "Nevertheless, the Liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows." (§10)

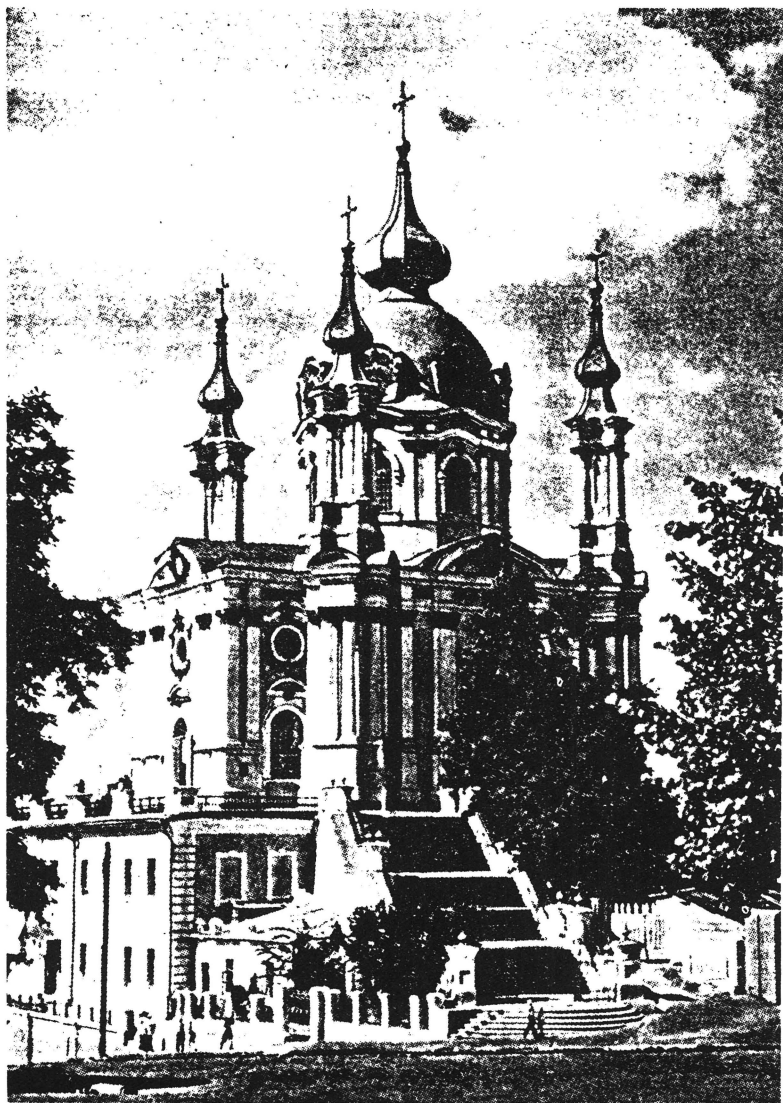
## **The Trunk of the Tree of the Liturgical Year**

The root nourishes the whole tree, but it is the trunk that bears its entire weight. The trunk of the tree of the Liturgical Year are the events from the life of Jesus Christ made present in the various feasts. Christ is the author and the center of the Liturgical Year. It is not surprising, therefore, that the cult of the person of Jesus Christ from the earliest apostolic times gave rise to the dedication of days and seasons to His special glory and veneration.

In the Old Testament, the Lord's day — that is, the day consecrated to God — was Saturday. In the New Testament the Lord's day became Sunday to commemorate the resurrection of Christ; for this reason, Sunday is the oldest Christian feast, and this feast with its Eucharistic Sacrifice is the kernel around which the feasts of our Lord began to form.

Speaking of the meaning of Sunday in the Liturgical Year, the Second Vatican Council in the decree on the "Constitution on the Liturgy" says: "Hence the Lord's Day is the original feast day, and it should be proposed to the piety of the faithful and taught to them so that it may become in fact a day of joy and of freedom from work. Other celebrations, unless they be truly of greatest importance, shall not have precedence over the Sunday which is the foundation and kernel of the whole Liturgical Year." (§106)

The apostles and the first Christians at first observed the Jewish feasts. But gradually these were supplanted by the feasts of the New Testament, the first of which, besides Sunday, was the glorious festival of the Pasch (or the Resurrection or Easter). This feast, the first in the cycle of the Liturgical Year, became the core of all the feasts and Sundays connected with the paschal season. The Feast of the Pentecost or the Descent of the Holy Spirit is closely linked with the feast of the Pasch. In the third century, the feast of the Theophany became a universal celebration. Later on other feasts of the Lord came into being — the Nativity, Circumcision and Presentation (4c), Ascension (5c), Transfiguration (6c), and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (7c). In the eleventh century, the sum of our Lord's feasts reached the symbolic number of twelve. It is interesting to note that at first the feasts of the Mother of God were not included among the twelve great feasts.



*St. Andrew's Church in Kiev*

## **The Crown of the Tree of the Liturgical Year**

The natural completion of every tree is its crown, that is, the branches, leaves and blossoms. Similarly, the tree of the Liturgical Year did not limit itself only to the feasts of our Lord, but found its completion in the feasts of the Blessed Mother of God and the saints which constitute its crown.

By proclaiming the dogma of the Divine Maternity of the most Pure Virgin Mary, the Council of Ephesus (431) opened wide the door to the liturgical cult of Mary. From that time on various feasts of the Mother of God began to appear one after another. Truly noteworthy is the fact that the principal ancient Marian feasts originated in the Eastern Church. The very first Marian feasts which appeared after the Council of Ephesus were the feasts of the Dormition or Assumption and the Annunciation. In the centuries immediately following, appeared the feasts of the Nativity of the Mother of God, the Conception of Anna, the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, the Patronage, and other minor feasts.

The other important element crowning the tree of the Liturgical Year is the cult of the saints. The veneration of saints began in the first centuries with the veneration of the tombs and relics of the holy martyrs. Their names began more and more to fill the days of the Church Calendar. Along with the cult of the Martyrs, the cult of the Apostles developed, and later still the cult of the Bishops, Patriarchs, Old Testament Saints, Ascetics, that is, holy Monks and Nuns, and the Angels. Between the fourth and fifth centuries, the veneration of the Saints became a general practice in the Church. Between the sixth and eighth centuries our Ecclesiastical Year assumed its present form. Since then all that was left to do was to add other new saints to the Church Calendar.

At the time our prince Wolodymyr the Great received the Christian faith from Byzantium a completely developed Church Calendar already existed. In the course of time, our Church added her own Ukrainian saints to this Calendar, such as: St. Olga, prince Wolodymyr the Great, the princes Borys and Hlib, the venerable Anthony and Theodosius Pechersky and others.

Because, for various reasons, holy Church wished to pay special veneration to certain saints, their feasts became holydays on which all the faithful were obliged to be present

at the Divine Liturgy and to refrain from strenuous physical work. Such holy days of obligation became quite numerous in our Church. The Synod of Zamost (1720) lists seventeen holydays of obligation in honor of the saints, in addition to the feasts of our Lord and the Blessed Mother of God. The Synod of Lviv (1891) diminished the number of these obligatory feasts of the saints. Some it reduced to the rank of an ordinary church holyday, while others were transferred to Sunday.

In 1969 our Bishops' Synod held in Rome reduced the many holydays of obligation not only of the saints, but also those of our Lord and the Mother of God. The Synod decreed: "In regard to the celebration of holydays in the Ukrainian Catholic Church, the Synod, taking into consideration the new social and economic conditions of the life and work of our faithful, and the dispensations which other local Churches have granted, decrees in the spirit of the canons of the Second Vatican Council that beginning with the first of January, 1970, the following holydays shall be obligatory for all the faithful: All the Sundays in the Calendar, the Nativity (Christmas), Theophany (Epiphany), the Resurrection (Pasch, Easter), the Pentecost — one day only (the first day), the Naming (Circumcision) of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Annunciation of the most Pure Virgin Mary, the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Dormition (Assumption) of the most Holy Mother of God." (§18)

The Synod obliges all the faithful in conscience to observe these feastdays, and there is no strict obligation to observe other traditional holydays.

### **The Fruit of the Tree of the Liturgical Year**

The evangelist John in the book of Revelation speaks of the "tree of life which brings forth twelve crops of fruit in a year, one in each month, and the leaves of which are the cure for the nations" (Revelation 22,2). So it is with our Liturgical-Ecclesiastical Year — it is the grace-giving tree of life, which generously imparts to us its spiritual fruits every day, week, month and year. Whoever takes active part in the celebration of feasts of the Liturgical Year will bring forth abundant fruit — the fruit of faith, hope, love of God and neighbor, the fruits of the spirit of prayer and sacrifice and the various virtues without which one cannot become a true Christian.

Our Liturgical Year, therefore, should bring us closer to and transform us into Christ. Just as Christ is the center of the Liturgical Year, so too He should be the center of our life.



*Deesis (16th c.)*

# History of Sunday Observance

*"Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day." (Ex. 20,8)*

In the Old Testament a separate commandment of God prescribed the observance of the Sabbath day. This day was to serve as a continual reminder to the Israelites of the creation of the world, of all that God had done for them and of the covenant He made with the people.

As has been noted above, in the New Testament this obligation of worshipping God was transferred to Sunday. The decree of the Second Vatican Council on the "Constitution on the Liturgy" declares: "By a tradition handed down from the apostles which took its origin from the very day of Christ's resurrection, the Church celebrates the paschal mystery every eighth day; with good reason this, then, bears the name of the Lord's day or Sunday." (§106)

The Sabbath law commanded above all rest from all physical labor. The chief Sunday obligation of the first Christians was to encounter the risen Christ by participating in the Sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist and uniting with Him in Holy Communion.

Small wonder, then, that Sunday from the very beginning was kept as an important feast of the Lord and the foundation of the Liturgical Year. The observance of Sunday has a long and interesting history, which, because of its importance, we shall briefly outline here.

## Observance of Sunday in Apostolic Times

Sunday should not be considered as merely a substitute for the Old Testament Sabbath. As a creation of Christianity it is filled with a profoundly Christian meaning. This is evident in the great variety of names given to it. What was the meaning of Sunday to the Apostles and the first Christians?

## **Sunday — The First Day**

The last day of the week, Saturday, was sacred to the Jews, it was the symbol of God's rest after creating the world, whereas the first day of the week was sacred to the Christians, for it was the symbol of the new creation begun in the Resurrection of Christ. As Eusebius of Alexandria (5c) says: "It was on this day that the Lord began the first-fruits of the creation of the world, and on the same day He gave to the world the first-fruits of the Resurrection."

## **Sunday — Sun Day or Day of the Sun**

The ancient Romans, following the Egyptians, called Sunday the "Day of the Sun", from which comes the English name, "Sunday". To the early Fathers of the Church this name had a profound meaning, for they considered the sun as the symbol of Jesus Christ: St. Justin the Martyr (†165) says: "We come together on the day of the sun on which God, changing darkness and matter created the world, and on which Jesus Christ our Saviour arose from the dead." Eusebius of Caesarea similarly remarks: "It was on this day that at the time of creation when God said, 'Let there be light', there was light; and on this day also arose the Sun of Justice on our souls."

## **Sunday — The Eighth Day**

As early as the second century, Christian writers began calling Sunday the "eighth day". The Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas says, "And we, too, rejoice in celebrating the eighth day; because on that day Jesus rose from the dead, appeared to the Apostles and ascended into heaven." Origen (†254) says: "The number eight, which contains the power of the Resurrection, is the foreshadowing of the world to come." St. Ambrose gives the number eight the meaning of redemption: "The number eight is the fulfillment of our hope."

## **Sunday — The Day of the Lord or The Lord's Day**

This name which appears for the first time in the Book of Revelation of St. John (1,10), and was quickly taken up by



Christians, and in time replaced the name “day of the sun”. The “Day of the Lord” refers to Christ, who through His Resurrection on Sunday became the Lord, Conqueror and



*Golden-Domed Cathedral of St. Michael (1108-13 c.), Kiev, Ukraine*

### **The Observance of Sunday**

The observance or celebration of Sunday from the very beginning was one of joy and festivity, for every Sunday reminded the first Christians of the joyous event of Christ's Resurrection. For this reason, all signs of penance and sorrow, such as kneeling and fasting were set aside. Two things characterize the Christian's observance of Sunday, namely, assistance at the Divine Liturgy and abstinence or rest from strenuous physical work.

### **The First Characteristic — The Eucharistic Sacrifice**

Participation in the Divine Liturgy is the chief characteristic of keeping holy the Lord's Day. Although in the

first centuries Christians assisted at the Divine Liturgy frequently, even daily, nevertheless, Sunday was a day of special observance for the whole Christian community. In the writing called the Didache or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, which is attributed to the second century, we read: "Assemble on the Lord's Day and break bread and offer the Eucharist; but first make confession of your faults, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one."

At first, the presence of all the faithful at the Sunday Divine Liturgy was not an obligation imposed upon the faithful by the Church. Custom and zeal led them to observe an unwritten law. Legislation regarding Sunday observance came at a much later date, when zeal of the early Christians had already diminished.

The first laws of the Western Church, which obliged the faithful to be present in church on Sunday, were promulgated by the Council of Elvira, Spain, at the beginning of the fourth century. This Council decreed: "If anyone in the city neglects to come to church for three Sundays, let him be excommunicated for a brief period so that he may be corrected." The Council of Agde, France (506) passed an explicit law regarding the obligation of being present at the Divine Liturgy on Sunday.

In the Eastern Church, the local Council of Sardica (modern Sofia, Bulgaria) in 347, mentions in the eleventh canon that there exists a law handed down by the Holy Fathers, that anyone who lived in the city and did not assist at the Divine Liturgy for three successive Sundays must be excommunicated from the Church. This same law is repeated also in the 80th canon of the Council of Trullo (692).

Recalling the Sunday obligation of participating in the Divine Liturgy, the decree of the Second Vatican Council on "Eastern Churches" declares: "The faithful are bound to take part on Sundays and feast days in the Divine Liturgy or, according to the regulations or customs of their own rite, in the celebration of the divine office." (§15)

## **The Second Characteristic — Rest from Work**

The second characteristic of sanctifying Sunday is rest from strenuous physical work. During the first centuries



*"Thus heaven and earth were completed with all their array. On the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing. He rested on the seventh day... God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on that day he had rested after all his work of creating."  
(Genesis 2;1-3)*

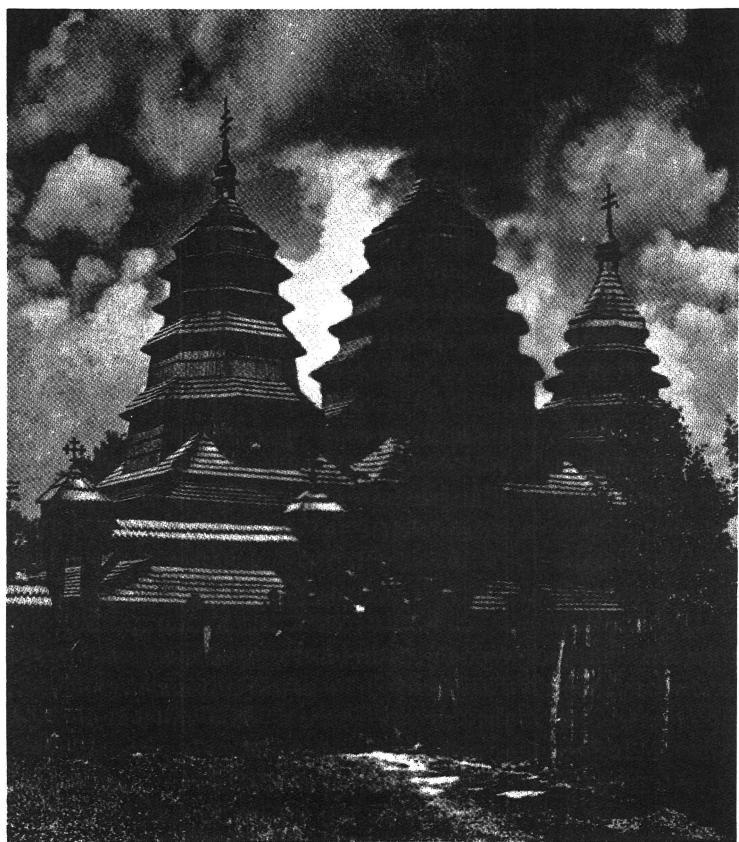
Christians did not enjoy freedom of religion and were persecuted. For the early Christians, therefore, Sunday was an ordinary workday. Since they had to work during the day, they conducted their Sunday services in the late evening, or early morning.

Sunday rest began to assume greater significance when in 313 A.D. the Church was granted complete religious freedom under Emperor Constantine the Great. The first laws regarding Sunday rest did not come from the Church, but from the state. In 321 A.D. Emperor Constantine issued an edict in which he decreed: "On the most revered day of the Sun let all judges, townspeople and all laborers rest. Only let the farmers in the villages work freely without hindrance." The historian Eusebius (†c.340) testified that the Emperor Constantine the Great made Sunday a day of prayer, ordered all his subjects to put aside their work, and excused all Christian soldiers from duty so that they might attend Sunday Service. The Emperor Theodosius the Great (379-395) first of all forbade all public spectacles, then later in the decree of 386 he prohibited all court proceedings, commercial, business and legal transactions. Whoever violated this law incurred the same penalty imposed for sacrilege. Such civil laws, of course, promoted the observance of Sunday as a holy day of prayer and rest.

Concurrent with civil legislation, the Church began more and more to enjoin her faithful to abstain from physical work on Sunday. The Council of Laodicea in Asia Minor in 364 prescribed Sunday rest "as far as possible". Emperor Leo the Wise (886-911) forbade farmers to work on Sunday. The patriarch of Constantinople Nicephor (806-815) declared that Christians should not even travel on Sunday, unless it was necessary. As early as the eighth century we find more and more local synods prescribing Sunday rest.

In the West, Emperor Charlemagne in 789 banned work on Sunday as a violation of the third commandment of God. In 1234, under Pope Gregory IX, the law of Sunday rest became a universal practice in the Latin Church.

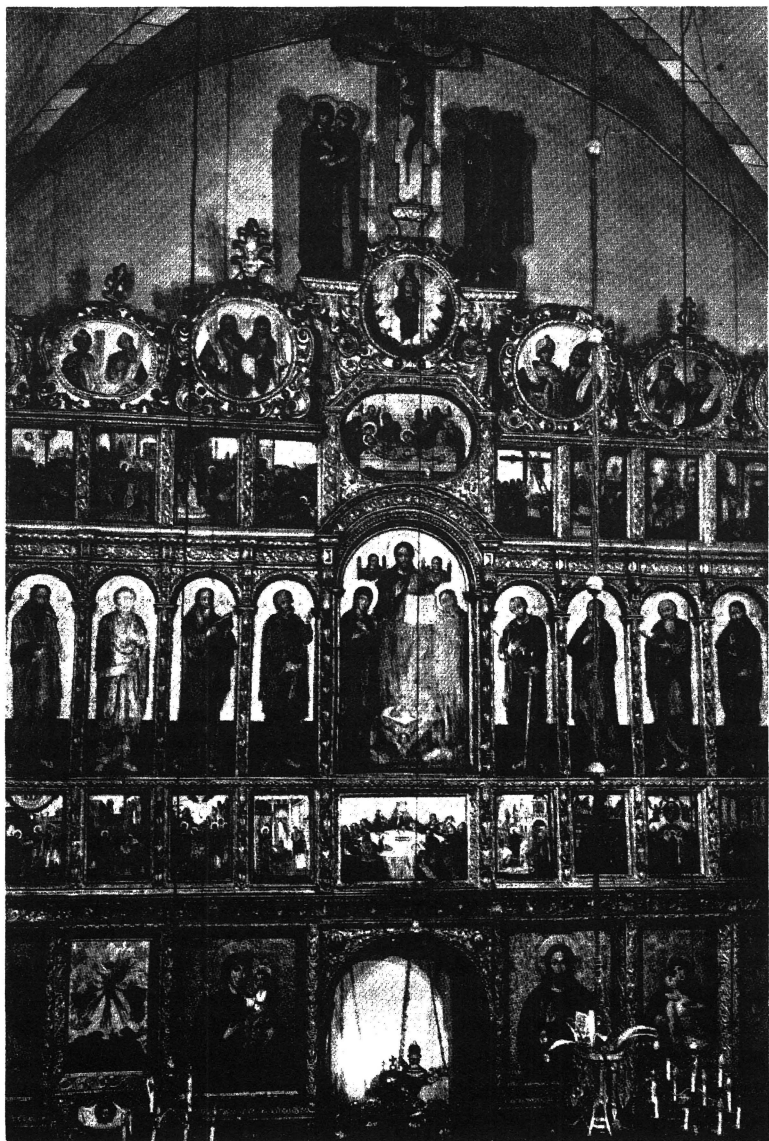
From this, it is evident that the celebration of Sunday is the oldest and a very sacred Christian tradition, which originated with the Apostles themselves. Consequently, participation in the Divine Liturgy and the observance of Sunday rest should be for us a natural practice of evident spiritual value. We must not forget that obligation to keep Sunday holy



*Wooden church in Boiko Land, 1763*

is not only a Church law, but basically also a divine law from which no dispensation can be given. Even if for grave reasons we cannot be present in Church for Sunday services, nevertheless, we are obliged to keep Sunday holy in our own way. We can do this, for example, by frequent remembrance of God, longer prayers, spiritual reading, and guarded speech and conduct.

In this regard our Servant of God, Metropolitan A. Sheptytsky, O.S.B.M. says: "The law that enjoins presence at the Divine Liturgy, and the law of rest or inactivity on Sunday, are Church laws which only define, explain and complement more clearly the natural and positive law of God in the Mosaic legislation... Nothing can at any time dispense from the law of God, neither ecclesiastical authority nor burdensome circumstances. All are obliged to observe the Law of God, even if it means risking or losing one's life... Thus the obligation to observe Sunday, in so far as it is a Church law, does not oblige **when its fulfillment involves a great burden and inconvenience**... But the third commandment is such, that no burden, no inconvenience and no authority whatever has the power to dispense from it; because the third commandment is also in the New Testament a commandment of God; that is, an **obligation that is inviolable and infallibly and indiscriminately binding** on all. This obligation is also an obligation of the natural law, that is, an obligation which every person can know from natural reason and experience in his conscience. To fail to fulfill that part of the third commandment which pertains to the natural law is, therefore, a sin even under circumstances which relieve one of the obligation to participate in the Divine Liturgy and to abstain from manual work. The failure to observe that commandment will always be a sin, and consequently, a great loss and injury to the soul." (On the Observance of Sunday, 1942)



*Iconostasis in Holy Friday Church in Lviv (1644)*

# The Veneration of the Martyrs

*“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christianity.” (Tertullian)*

The Liturgical Year can be compared to the skies in which during the day the brilliant sun shines, radiating warmth and light, while at night the moon shines brightly and millions of stars glitter. Similarly, in the skies of the Liturgical Year the most brilliant Sun of Justice, Jesus Christ, always shines, with His Most Blessed Mother beside Him, like the bright moon, and round them, like heavenly stars, the immense multitude of saints. Besides the festivals in honor of Jesus Christ and the Mother of God, every day of the Church Calendar is dedicated to the honor of various saints of greater or lesser importance.

Among the various groups of saints, the holy martyrs hold a special place. The reason for this is that they are the most beautiful flowers in the garden of Christ's Church, and the first-fruits of the Christian faith, that God has chosen for Himself as a holocaust or burnt offering. The holy martyrs are eloquent witnesses who by their heroic love of God testify to the truth and to our holy faith. Because of their sufferings and martyrdom, the Christian faith grew with remarkable rapidity and became marvelously strong. From the very beginning, their graves became the places where they were venerated. As a matter of fact, it was with this veneration that the cult of the Saints originated. The number of martyrs is known only to God alone. But the greater part of the Church Calendar is filled with their names. Therefore, it may help us to understand the Church Calendar better if we say a few words about the cult of the holy martyrs.

## Why Do We Venerate the Martyrs?

The term “martyr” is derived from the Greek word “martyr” which means “a witness”. Truly, a martyr is a witness of





*St. Stephen Protomartyr —  
S. Hordynsky*



*St. Josaphat — S. Hordynsky*

heroic love of God, a witness of unbending faith and a holocaust. The Second Vatican Council in the "Constitution on the Church" gives the following meaning of martyrdom: "Since Jesus, the Son of God, manifested His charity by laying down His life for us, so too no one has greater love than he who lays down his life for Christ and His brothers... By martyrdom, a disciple is transformed into an image of his Master by freely accepting death for the salvation of the world, as well as by his conformity to Christ in the shedding of his blood. The Church then considers martyrdom as an exceptional gift and as the fullest proof of love." (§42)

We honor the Martyrs not only as heroes of the holy faith, but also as our intercessors before God. Their innocent blood and wounds are a most powerful and appealing prayer, which the Lord cannot resist.

### **How Did the Cult of the Martyrs Develop?**

The earliest information we have concerning the liturgical celebration in honor of the martyrs comes from the second century. For the early Christians, the anniversary of the death of a martyr was a day of joy and festivity. On that day, they would offer the Unbloody Sacrifice over his tomb, sing various hymns, read an account of his sufferings and death, and then hold an agape or banquet of love.

The earliest testimony relating to the celebration of the anniversary of the death of a martyr is found in the Acts of the Martyrdom of St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch (†c.115). There we read: "After having spent a few days at his tomb singing hymns, the Christians agreed in the future to pay tribute to his life and sufferings, and thus while commemorating him they gave glory to the Lord Jesus."

Noteworthy is the fact that the first Christians regarded the day of the death of a martyr as the day of his birth into eternal life. This was the reason that, afterwards, when the Church Calendar was being formed, it did not give the day of earthly birth of the martyrs and saints, but gave the day of heavenly birth, that is, of birth into eternal life. The only exceptions were the nativity of our Lord, that of the most Holy Virgin Mary, and St. John the Baptist. Only at a much later date did the days of their birth begin to be celebrated. The

agapes which were held at the tombs of the martyrs were called birth-feasts, or birthday banquets.



### **Sources of Information Concerning the Suffering and Death of the Martyrs**

Three sources provide us with information concerning the sufferings and death of the martyrs:

1. **Court or legal proceedings, or so-called Acts of the Martyrs:** — The protocols or court proceedings are very valuable sources, because they are the official records of court procedures, made by the secretaries of the Proconsul or Procurator. The protocols recorded the denunciation, the court hearing, the testimony of witnesses, and the verdict of death. These documents were preserved in the public archives; copies could be obtained for a fee, and the Christians usually obtained them. Some of these protocols have come down to us intact in their original form.

The Acts of St. Justine the Martyr and his six companions (†c.165) belong to the earliest authentic sources. There we have the verdict of the prefect: "Let those who will not offer sacrifice to the gods and obey the command of Caesar, be scourged and led to the place of execution as the law enjoins."

**2. Records made by Christian eyewitnesses:** — Among the earliest sources of this kind is the letter of a certain Marcion to the Church in Philomelium in Asia Minor concerning the death of St. Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (†156). This letter describes in detail the imprisonment, trial and heroic death at the stake.

Some Christian communities took special care to record in detail and collect all the facts pertaining to the sufferings and death of the martyrs. Pope Clement I (91-100) divided the city of Rome into seven districts and appointed a notary for each section who would diligently observe, investigate, and record the cases of the martyrs from his particular district. Pope Fabian (236-251) subjected those notaries to seven sub-deacons, who verified all the acts collected by the notaries and submitted them to the Pope for approval. These acts were then preserved in the Church archives. St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (†258) sent priests and deacons throughout the province to record the names, dates and days of death of the Martyrs, so they might be commemorated on the anniversary of their death.

**3. The third source of information are legends, that is, the pious accounts concerning the martyrs:** — These were written in later times, and have no great historical value in them, for truth and phantasy are frequently interwoven.

### **Calendars — Menologies — Synaxaries**

From these lists of martyrs compiled from the records of various Churches, the Calendar, that is, a list of feasts arranged in chronological order, gradually began to develop. One of the oldest calendars is that of Furius Dionysius Philocalus. Actually, it is a pagan calendar of the year 352, which also contains a list of twelve Roman popes from 252 to 352 A.D., with the day of their burial indicated. This calendar which extends to the year 304, also contains a list of twenty-two Roman martyrs and several others from beyond the city limits of Rome.

The first calendars gave only the name, date of death and place of burial for each martyr. Later calendars began to provide a little more information about the Martyrs. In the Western Church, these Calendars were called martyrologies — histories or accounts of martyrs, registers of martyrs. In the

Eastern Church they were called menologies, that is, a list of the monthly services in honor of the saints. Among the oldest purely Christian menologies is the Syriac menology from the year 411.

The first calendars did not have saints assigned to every day of the year. Complete calendars with names of martyrs or saints assigned for every day of the year began to make their appearance in the West in the sixth and seventh centuries; in the East they appeared at even a later date. By accepting the holy faith from Byzantium our ancestors accepted also the Calendar of saints used in the Byzantine Church.

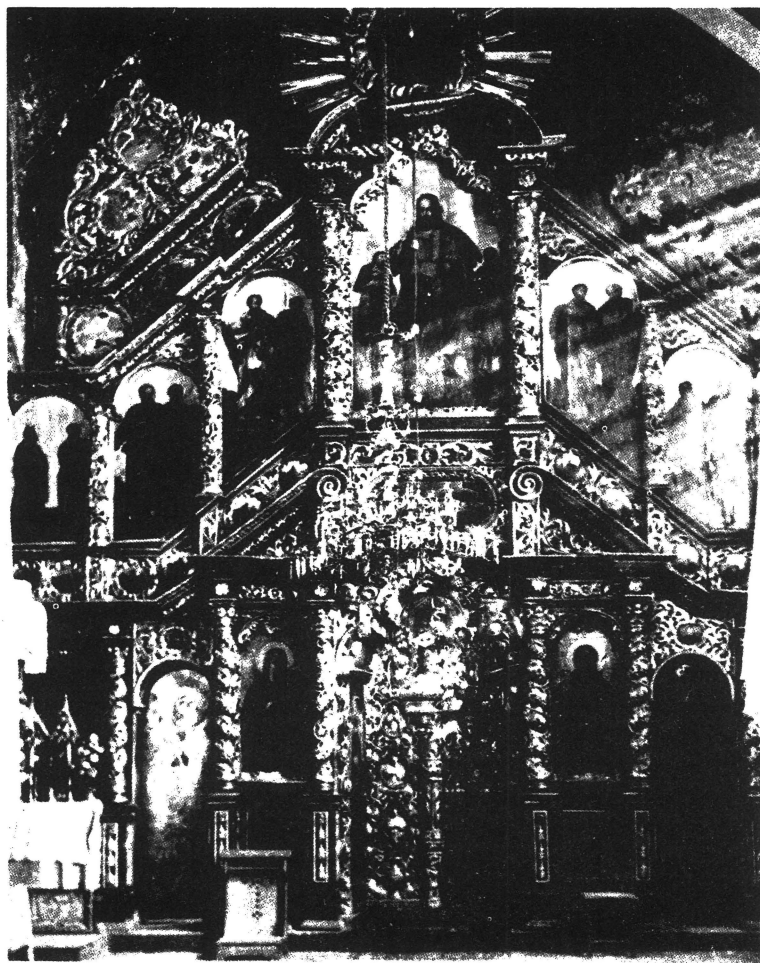
The local Synod of Carthage (418 or 419) permitted the reading of the sufferings of the Martyrs on the anniversary of their death (can. 54) during the divine office. From this time on, in both the East and the West, besides calendars and menologies, a collection of short biographies of the martyrs or saints, began to appear, arranged for liturgical use according to the days of the Church Year. In the Eastern Church, these collections are called "Prologues" from the Greek word "prologos" which means preface or foreword. These collections are also called Synaxaries, from the Greek word "Synaxarion" which means "collections". In the monasteries during daily Matins, at the sixth hymn of the canon, the Synaxaries of those saints whom the Church is commemorating on that day are read.

From the first Christians' practice of celebrating the Divine Liturgy over the grave of the martyrs, the custom arose in both the East and West of placing relics of holy martyrs in the altar during the consecration of a church. In this way, the altar, so to speak, became the tomb of the martyr. This custom, full of symbolism, was made a law for the entire Church by the Seventh Ecumenical Council (783).

The servant of God, Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky, when speaking of the significance of the cult of Martyrs says: "The cult of the Martyrs fosters in the souls of Christians that fortitude and courage needed to enable one to give up one's life for the faith. The faithful will be easily drawn to the veneration of the martyrs, if we direct their attention to that veritable treasure which the Church and the faithful possess — that is, the tomb of the martyr which is the altar consecrated by the bishop... The tomb of the Martyr is truly a great treasure... Whoever hastens to the Martyr with deep

faith can expect whatever they ask from God through His intercession.”

Therefore, whenever we are in Church, we find ourselves at the tomb of a martyr. Our awareness of this should inspire us to venerate and imitate the holy martyrs in our love of God and our appreciation and practice of the faith in our daily



*Iconostasis in Buchach, Galicia, 1661*

# **Moveable and Immovable Feasts**

Holydays or feasts of the Liturgical Year consider not only the objects of veneration, that is, the persons who are being venerated, but also the times when these feasts are celebrated. In this regard all the feasts of the Church Year are divided into two general groups: the moveable and immovable feasts.

The great feasts occupy a special place of honor in the Liturgical Year: the Nativity of our Lord (Christmas) and the Resurrection of our Lord or the Pasch (Easter). The reason for this is that the Nativity of our Lord is the beginning, and the Resurrection or the Pasch is the consummation of the redemption of mankind. These two feasts constitute the core around which all the holydays, Sundays, and sacred times are arranged.

## **What are the Moveable Feasts?**

In the Church Calendar we have feasts that do not occur on the same day of the month every year, but which occur sometimes sooner and sometimes later. The reason for this is that the time and day of their celebration depends on the feast of the Pasch (Easter) which has no fixed date. The feast of Easter can occur on any one of the Sundays between the 22nd of March and the 25th of April. Hence, those feasts that have no fixed date are called moveable feasts. The center of all the moveable feasts is Easter, therefore, the whole list of Sundays, festivals and sacred seasons which are dependent on Easter form the cycle of feasts called the Easter cycle.

## **What are the Immovable Feasts?**

Besides the moveable feasts which change their date each year, we have numerous feasts which never change, but

which fall every year on the same day of the month. For example, Christmas always occurs on the 25th of December, and the feast of the Assumption of the Mother of God on the 15th of August. These feasts that never change their date are called immovable feasts. The cycle of immovable feasts begins with the Ecclesiastical New Year on the 1st of September and ends on the 31st of August.

While the center of the moveable feasts is Easter, the center of the immovable feasts is the Nativity (Christmas), although not all immovable feasts are dependent on this feast. These immovable feasts, dependent on the Nativity, constitute the Christmas cycle.

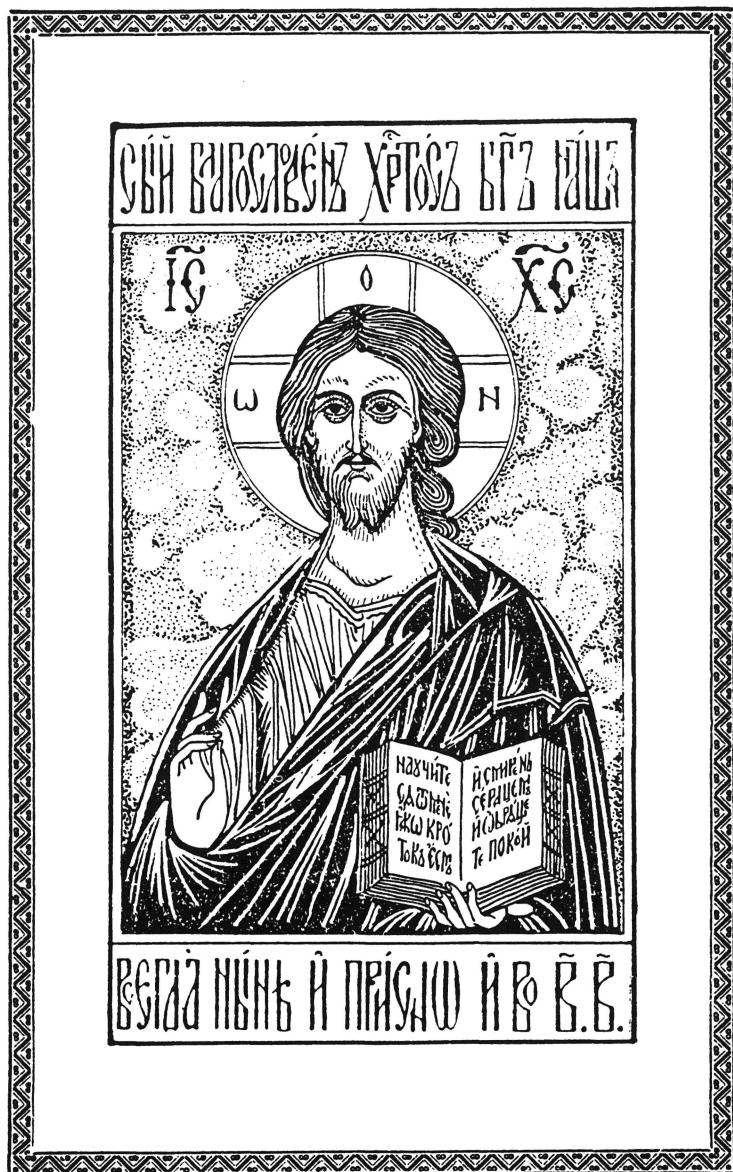
### **The Easter or Paschal Cycle**

One who closely follows the Liturgical Year of our Church will readily perceive, that she re-lives each festal event in a deeply spiritual manner. This may be observed in our feastday services which, with their profound prayers, songs, hymns and symbolic rites, place before our eyes both the factual content and the deep theology of each feast. Therefore, it should not surprise us that the feastday services impress us so strongly and stir us to the depths of our souls. This is why the Church diligently prepares the faithful spiritually, psychologically and physically for every feast. The greater the feast, the greater and longer is the preparation for it, and the longer is the post-festal celebration.

This is why the feast of the Resurrection of our Lord, which is the greatest feast in the Year, requires an extraordinarily long preparation as well as a long post-festal celebration which is, as it were, a prolongation of the feast of Easter.

Historically, the Paschal or Easter cycle began to develop much earlier than the Christmas cycle, because the feast of the Pasch was in practice earlier than the feast of the Nativity of our Lord (Christmas). Hence, we shall say a little more about the Easter cycle, since with it, we shall begin a more detailed explanation of the Liturgical Year.





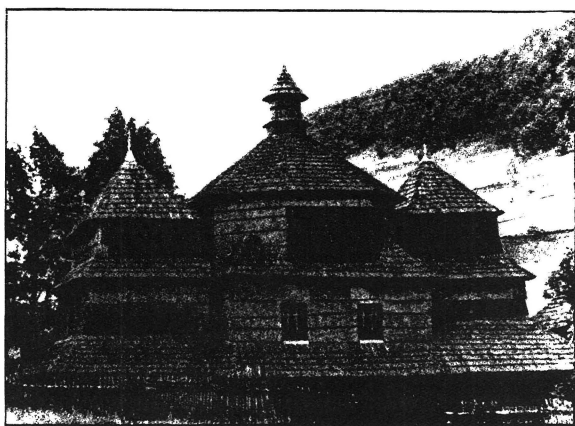
## **What Constitutes the Easter Cycle?**

The Easter cycle begins with the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, ten weeks before Easter, and terminates eight weeks after Easter with the Sunday of All Saints. The Easter cycle is divided into pre-paschal, i.e., the season or period before Easter, and the Easter season.

The pre-paschal season consists of four Sundays preceeding Lent. These are: the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, Sunday of the Prodigal Son, Meatfare and Cheesefare Sundays, and also the Great Fast or the Forty Days Fast — which extends from Cheesefare Sunday to Palm Sunday, and finally, Passion Week — which is usually included in the Great Fast.

The Easter cycle lasts from the Sunday of St. Thomas (the Sunday after Easter) to the Sunday of All Saints. The period from Easter to Pentecost embraces fifty days and is called by the common name of Pentecost. The Sundays in the Easter season are each named for the event recounted in the Gospel of that day. These occur in the following order: the Sunday of St. Thomas, the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women, the Sunday of the Paralytic, the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman, the Sunday of the Blind Man, the Sunday of the Fathers of the Church, the Sunday of the Descent of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost) and the Sunday of All Saints. The Easter season, i.e., the post-feast of the Resurrection, lasts forty days, that is, to the feast of the Ascension of our Lord.

The Easter cycle includes thirty two Sundays which follow in consecutive order and for this reason are called ordinary Sundays to distinguish them from the festal Sundays which have their own proper epistle and Gospel. There are a few such festal Sundays in the year, as for example, the Sunday before and after the Nativity of our Lord and the Sunday before and after the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The ordinary Sundays begin with the Sunday of All Saints and end their cycle on the Sunday of Zaccheus which is followed by the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee. The number of these ordinary Sundays depends upon the date of Easter; that is, if Easter comes earlier then there will be more ordinary Sundays, if later, fewer ordinary Sundays.



*Wooden Church in Husnyj, Carpatho-Ukraine (18th c.)*

### **The Spiritual Significance of the Paschal Cycle**

The principal aim of the Paschal cycle, first of all, is to prepare our hearts and souls for a worthy encounter with the Risen Christ. We prepare ourselves for this joyful meeting by humble prayer, fasting, penance and meditation on the passion and sufferings of Christ. This preparation culminates in Easter Confession and Holy Communion. And so, with a pure heart, we go forth to meet the Risen Christ, singing the hymn of victory: "Christ is risen from the dead, by death He conquered death, and to those in the graves, He granted life."

The next aim of the Easter cycle is to have us participate in Christ's joy, victory and triumph, for, just as He rose from the dead, so we too, shall rise to new life. "For the hour is coming," says Christ, "in which all who are in the tombs shall hear the voice of the Son of God. And they who have done good shall come forth unto resurrection of life; but they who have done evil, unto resurrection of judgement." (John 5, 28)

Our re-enacting the Easter cycle is very closely related to the church services of that season. These services, depending on whether they bear a joyful or penitential character, put our souls in a joyful or penitential mood. The Easter season teaches us the great and salutary lesson of salvation history, namely, that there is no glorious resurrection without a Calvary; that, like Jesus Christ, we too, must pass through the Golgotha of our life, in order to enter into the joy of the everlasting Easter heaven.

## The Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee

*“Whoever lives like the Pharisee, lives  
far away from the Church” (Synaxary of Matins)*

Before the soldier goes to battle, he undergoes a long period of military training to prepare himself physically and psychologically for combat and to enable him to bear the burdens and inconveniences of military life.

In like manner, holy Church, our good Mother, prepares us, her children, spiritually for the struggles we must undergo before she imposes upon us the strict Great Fast (Forty-Days Fast). This is precisely the aim of the four pre-lenten Sundays which begin with the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee and end with Cheesefare Sunday. In the Church services of those Sundays, holy Church places before our eyes several biblical scenes: the proud Pharisee and the humble Publican, the conversion of the Prodigal Son, the scene of the Last Judgement and the expulsion of our First Parents from Paradise. These dramatic scenes have the power to move us to the depths; they reveal God's mercy and justice, and convince us of the need for conversion and penance for our salvation. Meditation on these events should evoke in us a serious attitude toward fasting, convincing us of its necessity and benefit as it gradually prepares us for the Fast itself.

The above pre-lenten Sundays historically were incorporated into our Church Calendar in the later centuries; it was not until then that the Great Fast assumed its present day form. First to be added before the Great Fast were the Sundays of Meatfare and Cheesefare; only later, sometime in the eighth or ninth centuries, the Sundays of the Publican and the Pharisee and the Sunday of the Prodigal Son were added.



*The Publican and the Pharisee*

### **The Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee**

In teaching the people, Jesus Christ frequently used parables. These are stories that, in clear and simple terms, communicated a moral, truth or virtue to the people. We find it very easy to listen to a parable and to understand and retain its message in our memory.

The Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee received its name from the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, recorded in the Gospel of St. Luke (18,10-14). In this parable, Jesus Christ gives us two contrasts: the proud Pharisee and the humble Publican. Using these two types of people, He points out the ugliness of pride and the significance of humility.

During the times of Jesus Christ the Pharisees constituted a religious sect which insisted upon the strict and legalistic observance of the Mosaic Law and traditions. They esteemed the letter of the law more highly than the spirit of the law. Their righteousness was based on the external observance of the Law and the various petty regulations rather than in the practice of the virtues which the Law prescribed. They

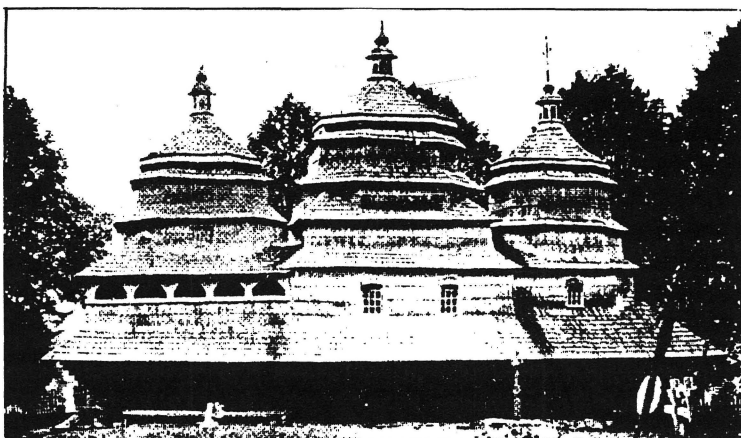
regarded themselves as champions and zealous followers of the Law, they boasted of their false zeal, and looked down upon those who did not belong to their sect. Jesus Christ frequently rebuked them for their pettiness and dissimulation and publicly exposed their hypocrisy. "The Scribes and Pharisees have sat on the chair of Moses," He said. "All things, therefore, that they command you, observe and do. But do not act according to their works; for they talk and do nothing... Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men. For you yourselves do not go in, nor do you allow those going in to enter... Blind guides who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel... Whited sepulchres...who outwardly appear just to men but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." (Matthew 23)

The parable portrays a typical Pharisee. Although he came to the temple to pray, he praised, not God but himself. He does not ask God to pardon his sins. On the contrary, being sure of his righteousness, he even thanks God that he is not a sinner. He brags about his fasting and the tithes he gives to the temple of God, while at the same time, he looks down upon the Publican as upon a great sinner.

The Publican, conscious of his own sinfulness, does not even dare raise his eyes to heaven, but prays humbly and strikes his breast, saying: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." (Luke 18,13) His short prayer, full of sorrow and humility, remains to this day, a most beautiful and sincere act of sorrow for our sins.

Jesus Christ ends this parable with the words: "I tell you, this man went back to his home justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted." (Luke 18)

The publicans were tax-gatherers who collected the various state taxes during the Roman occupation of Palestine. The Roman government had two types of state taxes: direct and indirect. Direct taxes were property and income taxes, while the indirect taxes were fees on sales and purchases as well as on imports and exports. The direct taxes were collected by the Roman government, while the indirect taxes were auctioned off to wealthy merchants who collected these revenues themselves. This system of collecting taxes led to every kind of extortion and injustice, for these wealthy mer-



*Wooden Church — Western Ukraine, 1820*

chants, called publicans, having received the right to collect taxes from the government, exacted them without mercy. Whatever they gathered above and beyond what they owed the government, they kept for themselves as personal profit. One can easily see why they were so hated by the people. Not only were they hated and despised persons who worked for foreign overlords, but they also were regarded as renegade Jews who incurred ritual defilement because of their contact with pagans. The people classified them with robbers, public sinners and pagans and despised them. Their testimony was not accepted in a court of justice because, since they had the reputation of dishonest men, their word could not be relied on.

### **The Spiritual Significance of the Parable**

This parable teaches us clearly that God does not look at the person or his position in life, but at the person's heart and soul. This enables us to understand the truth of the words of Holy Scripture: "God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5,5) It is understandable then why God rejected the prayer of the vaunting and arrogant Pharisee but heard the prayer of the humble Publican. Since pride is one of the capital sins, it is the greatest obstacle to conversion and

penance, while humility is the beginning of true conversion and the foundation of sincere penance and fasting.

For this reason, holy Church desires that we also, as we approach the Great Fast, prepare ourselves for it with great humility, mindful of our sinfulness, for only then will we experience compunction of heart and possess the courage and goodwill to undertake fasting and penance. Without humility there is no conversion, no sorrow for sin, and no return to God.

This is the spirit in which our liturgical services and prayers were composed for this Sunday. The troparions, sticheras and the canon, time and again, emphasize and praise the virtue of humility and reproach pharisaical pride:

“My soul,” we sing in the sticheras of Vespers, “having seen the difference between the Pharisee and the Publican, loathe the tone of that braggart, and emulate this one’s prayer of true reverence, crying: God, cleanse me a sinner, and have mercy on me.”

“Let us run away from the words of the boastful Pharisee,” says the Kontakion of this day, “and learn the humility of the Publican, crying with sighs to the Saviour: Have mercy on us; O Saviour of the world, purify your servants.”

### **Penitential Troparions — Symbol of True Humility**

In the service of the Publican and the Pharisee we find three troparions which merit our attention because of their mood, which is prayerful, penitential and full of humility. Holy Church sings these troparions during the Matins service of every Sunday, beginning with this Sunday to the fifth Sunday of Lent. These troparions set the tone not only for the pre-lenten Sundays, but for the entire Great Fast. The following are the three troparions:

“Open to me the doors of repentance, O Giver of life, for my spirit goes early to your temple, with the temple of my body all defiled; But in Thy compassion, purify me by the loving kindness of Your mercy.”

“Lead me on the paths of salvation, O Mother of God, for I have profaned my soul with shameful sins, and have wasted



my life in laziness. But by Your intercessions, deliver me from all impurity.”

“When I think of the many evil things I have done, wretch that I am, I tremble at the fearful day of judgement. But trusting in Your loving kindness, like David I cry to You: Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your great mercy.”



*Assumption Cathedral — Volodymyr Volynsk (1160)*  
(Drawing by George Moshinsky)

## **Privileged-Days or Days on Which Meat is Permitted**

During the Liturgical Year we have days of sadness, fasting and penance; but we also have days and weeks of gladness and joy during which the Church dispenses us from the prescribed fast and penance and permits us to relax both spirit and body. These periods, during which the Church sanctions the eating of meat and, in times past, also milk products, we call in Ukrainian “Zahalnytsia” from the Ukrainian word “zahalnyj” which means “general”. The Ukrainian word “Zahalnytsia” is a translation of the church-slavonic word “pospolyta” which means “general”, or “sedmetsa (week) vsejadna (all eating)” which means that week in which general permission is granted to all the faithful to eat meat products even on Wednesday and Friday. We also mention Wednesday because in times past, fasting was compulsory even on this day.

The period of the four pre-lenten Sundays is conspicuous in that Privileged-Days fall between the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee and the Sunday of the Prodigal Son. In the Liturgical Year we have several such Privileged-Days. Hence, we shall review briefly the history and practice of Privileged-Days, or total dispensation.

### **How Did the Privileged-Days Develop?**

Historically, the practice of the “Privileged-Days” arose during the first centuries of Christianity. From earliest times it was customary in the Church to dispense from the law of fasting on certain days and even during whole weeks for special reasons. This practice first began with the holydays that occurred on Wednesday and Friday. Later, in order to add greater solemnity to the oldest and greatest holyday, the Resurrection of our Lord (Easter) — fasting was banned during

the period extending from Easter to the Descent of the Holy Spirit, i.e., throughout the whole period called the season of the Pentecost.

During the first centuries there were very few such feast days that fell on Wednesday and Friday. In addition to the holydays of Easter and Pentecost, there was the feast of the Theophany (i.e., the baptism of Christ in the River Jordan) and Christmas (the Nativity of our Lord) both of which were celebrated together in the Eastern Church on the same day until the fourth century. With regard to the banning of fasting on the feast of the Theophany, St. Epiphanius of Cyprus (†403) says: "It is also not fitting to fast on the feast of the Theophany, when our Lord was born in the flesh, even if it falls on Wednesday or Friday."

When still other feasts of our Lord gradually came to be celebrated, even on those days, fasting was not observed, if they fell on Wednesday and Friday. Following the pattern of Privileged-Days after Easter, we have Privileged-Days also after Christmas to the Eve of the feast of the Theophany. These Christmas Privileged-Days, which last twelve days, are given the name "The Twelve Days" from the Greek word "dodekameron".

After the Council of Ephesus (431) when feasts in honor of our Blessed Mother began to appear, fasting was not observed even on these days, if they fell on Wednesday and Friday. Finally, even on certain feasts of great saints fasting was not observed.

Later, the Privileged-Days from the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee to the Sunday of the Prodigal Son were added to the above-mentioned Privileged-Days. This increase in Privileged-Days led to fasting being again resumed during the period of Pentecost, while the Privileged-Days of Easter were shortened to one week, i.e., from Easter Sunday to the Sunday of St. Thomas, as it remains at the present time.

This limiting or extending of the fasting period, it must be remembered, was not the result of Church prescription or law, but rather was the result of local customs, which in time acquired the force of unwritten law for other local Churches or even for the whole Church. Small wonder then, that in the Eastern Church for many centuries no complete uniformity existed regarding the observance of fasting. On the contrary, many disputes arose concerning this matter.

## Why Did the Privileged-Days Develop?

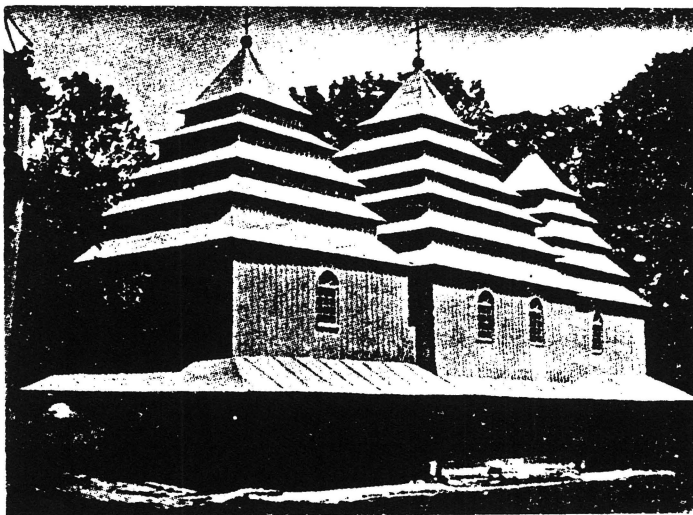
Various motives led to the development of the Privileged-Days. The words of our Lord addressed to the disciples of John can be regarded as the chief motive: "Why do we and the Pharisees often fast, whereas your disciples do not fast?" and Jesus said to them: "Can the wedding guest mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast." (Matthew 9,14-15).

To reconcile sadness with joy is difficult. Hence, in the celebration of feasts that fell on Wednesday or Friday, the question arose as to which precedence should be given — to fasting or to festal joy and jubilation. The decision was made that precedence should be given to joy and festivity. Thus fasting on Wednesday and Friday was supplanted by the festal joy of a holyday.

From a one-day Privileged-Day, a Privileged period of one week or longer gradually developed. For the Christians of the first centuries the most joyous feast was the Resurrection of our Lord. For this reason, they wished to prolong and retain the joyous spirit of Resurrection Day as long as possible. The best way of extending and retaining this joy was the elimination of fasting and kneeling until Pentecost. St. Epiphanius speaks of the Privileged-Days of the Pentecost: "The Wednesday and Friday fast is observed throughout the whole year and lasts until 9 o'clock, that is, until 3 o'clock in the afternoon our time. The fifty days of Pentecost are set aside, when there is no fasting or kneeling."

Reasons similar to those that led to the development of the Easter Privileged-Days also led to the development of the Twelve Privileged-Days from Christmas to the Theophany. For the Christians of the first centuries the period after Christmas was like another Pentecost. St. Theodore the Studite (759-826) explains the reason for the Christmas Privileged-Days in these words: "In order that we may not appear sad like the foolish Jews at the birth of Him who renewed us."

Other motives were given for the Privileged-Days after the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee. These Privileged-Days have their own particular history. The principal reason was the constant hostility between the Greeks



*Wooden Church in Western Ukraine, 1876*

and the Armenians whom the Greeks regarded as heretics. The Armenians during this week fasted on Friday and Saturday — on Friday in commemoration of the fast of the Ninevites, and on Saturday in memory of St. Sergius Stratelates (Greek word meaning “general, commander, leader of an army”). The Greeks in their hatred towards the Armenians even fabricated a story that the Armenians fast during that week on Saturday in memory of the dog Artziburius, which bishop Sergius would send before him to whatever place he went and which the wolves devoured. So as not to have anything in common with the fast of the Armenians, the Greeks introduced the Privileged-Days during that week.

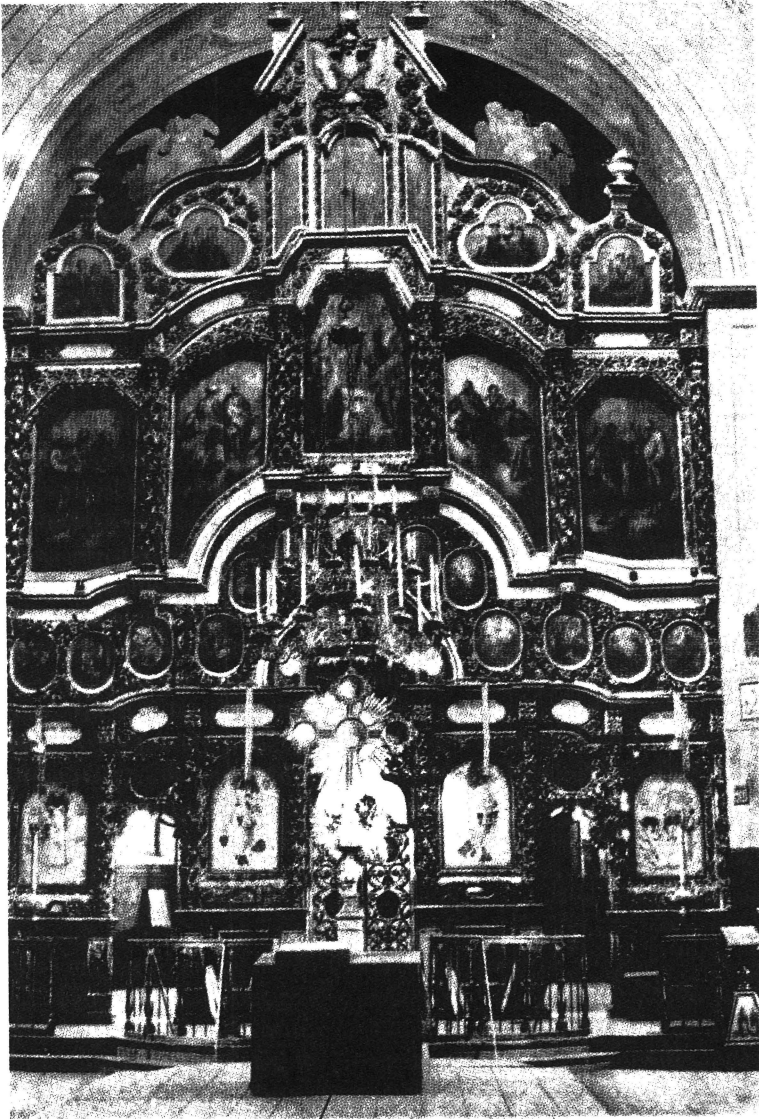
Another reason for this Privileged-Day was that in preparing the faithful for the Great Fast, the Church permitted meat products to be eaten throughout the whole week as though in opposition to the proud Pharisee who boasted that he fasts twice a week. St. Theodore the Studite speaks of this Privileged-Day: “Also, during the week which prepares us for penance, in which we read the holy Gospel of the Publican and the Pharisee, every kind of food is permitted, according to our Holy Fathers before us, so as to scorn in this manner the heretical doctrine of that totally impious Peter, bishop of the Armenians.”

It would appear that the Privileged-Days from Pentecost to the Sunday of All Saints appeared last. From one point of view, it prolonged the joy experienced on the feast of Pentecost, while from another viewpoint, it prepared the faithful for the fast in honor of Sts. Peter and Paul.

### **Privileged-Days in the Ukrainian Church**

When our ancestors accepted the Christian faith from Byzantium, most of the Privileged-Days had already been determined, although at that time the Greeks were still disputing about the relaxation of the fast on certain feastdays that fell on Wednesday or Friday. Regarding our practice of fasting and Privileged-Days in the eleventh century, we draw a lot of information from the "Precepts for Priests and Laymen" of the Kievan Metropolitan George (1069-1072). In his "Precepts" he does not mention the elimination of fasting on feastdays that fall on Wednesday or Friday. However, he does give directives for the period of the Pentecost, the Twelve Days, the week after the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee and Cheesefare Sunday. According to his "Precepts", fasting on Wednesday and Friday during the time of the Pentecost is partially mitigated. During those days he permits taking food twice a day instead of only once. Regarding the type of food, he permits meat only on Mid-Pentecost and during the week after the Pentecost. During the Twelve Days after the Nativity of our Lord he permits meat, but enjoins abstinence from milk and meat on the Eve of the Epiphany; this is still the custom today. During the Privileged-Days after the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee he allows meat only in those localities where Armenians against whom this Privileged-Day was instituted reside.

The historian E. Golubinsky remarks that in reference to the Pentecost our practice was not in accord with the directives of Metropolitan George because at one time we had no fast during the entire Pentecostal season. With regard to feastdays, a custom arose in our Church of not fasting on the feasts of our Lord and the Blessed Mother. Nor was a fast kept on the feasts of St. John the Baptist, St. Peter and Paul, St. John the Theologian, St. Great Martyr George, St. Demetrius and other feasts. The Nikon Chronicle (1168) speaks of our customs in the account of Polycarp, hegumen of the Kievan



*Iconostasis in Romny (1730's)*

Pechersky Monastery whom the Metropolitan of Kiev, Constantine II, removed from the post of hegumen when he arrived in Rus in 1167. He did this because Polycarp granted dispensations from fasting on the minor feasts of our Lord, the Blessed Mother of God, and the great Saints, as well as from Easter to Pentecost.

With the passing of the centuries, the custom of Privileged-Days in our church has become an accepted practice which is still observed today. The Synod of Zamost in 1720, when speaking of fasting, makes no mention of Privileged-Days. The Synod of Lviv (1891) speaks of four Privileged-Days, but does not mention exclusion of fasting on the feastdays that fall on Wednesday or Friday.

In reference to fasting, the Synod of Ukrainian bishops held in Rome in 1966, recalls the practice of our Privileged-Days with these words: "For the relaxation of fasting in our Rite, Privileged-Days were instituted during which, throughout a whole week (including Wednesday and Friday) it is permitted to eat meat. Therefore, eating meat is permitted:

1. From Christmas to the Eve of the Epiphany;
2. From the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee to the Sunday of the Prodigal Son;
3. From the Sunday of Easter to the Sunday of St. Thomas;
4. From the Pentecost to the Sunday of All Saints;
5. Should the feastdays of our Lord or those of Blessed Mother of God fall during the year on Wednesday or Friday (except the Great Fast, the Eve of Christmas and the Eve of Theophany, the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and the feast of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist), in conformity with the ancient custom it is permitted to eat meat...

All religious persons, monks, nuns and laity are bound in conscience to abstain from meat, i.e., to fast on all Fridays of the year, with the exception of the Privileged-Days and the feasts of our Lord and the Blessed Mother of God." (Blahovisnyk II, Bk. 2-4, pp. 196-197)



## Sunday of the Prodigal Son

*“Look, O Christ, upon the sorrow of my heart, look upon my conversion and my tears, O Saviour, and do not reject me!”  
(Ode 9 in the Canon of Matins of the Prodigal Son)*

In preparing us for the Great Fast holy Church pointed out in the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee that the first step to conversion is humility. On this Sunday, she sets before us the example of the Prodigal Son to show us how one is converted to God. Where there is humility and sorrow of heart, there the door to God's mercy is opened.

Scripture scholars call the parable of the Prodigal Son the pearl of all the parables. It is unique for its deep moral content. Its dramatic story is being constantly repeated in the souls of millions throughout the world. The Prodigal Son is the symbol of every sinful soul. This parable clearly demonstrates that nothing on earth can satisfy our biting hunger and parching thirst for happiness. True happiness and peace is to be found only in God, our loving Father. Some exponents of the spiritual life also call this parable, the parable of God's love.

Anyone who alienates himself from God by sin and seeks happiness outside of God, sooner or later, will be forced to say with the Prodigal Son: “I shall rise and go to my father.” (Luke 15,18) and with St. Augustine who was a prodigal son for many years, “Our heart is restless, O God, until it rests in you.”

### Highlights of the Parable

The parable of the Prodigal Son is known to all of us. We heard it related many times in our childhood, in our religion classes and we hear it every year in church, therefore, we

need not analyze it in detail. We shall direct our attention only to its more important aspects.

In the parable, Jesus Christ chooses the life of a wealthy family for His theme. The youngest of two sons wishes to leave his father's house to enjoy absolute freedom, to live a life according to the desires of his heart. And so, taking the portion of the inheritance that fell to him, he journeyed into a far-off country.

Under Jewish law the first-born or elder son received two thirds of the family estate, while the remaining third was divided among the other sons. In the parable there were only two sons; consequently, the youngest son received one third of the estate.

His first days of complete independence away from his family home were merry and happy ones. Unlimited freedom, a pocket full of money, many friends who are always present where there is money, continuous merrymaking caused him to become intoxicated with pleasure. Scarcely had he begun enjoying this unlimited freedom when his possessions, his friends and parties began to melt away like the spring snow, and soon he was reduced to abject poverty. In addition to all this, a famine devastated the country, and he was forced to become a swineherd. Among the Jews, to tend pigs was a sign of utter degradation because the Jews considered swine as ritually unclean animals. Thus the rich young man who **wished to live according to the desires of his heart becomes a despicable swineherd.**

Reflecting upon his misery and hunger, he decides to return to his father's house. He is even prepared to become his father's hired servant. However, when his father sees him while he is still a long way off, he is moved with pity. He runs to the boy, takes him into his arms and kisses him. He restores to him his former dignity as son, presenting him with a festive robe, a ring and sandals.

In the East, to present a man with a festive robe was a sign of special honor. The ring with the signet was the symbol of authority, worn by kings and high officials. The Bible relates that when Pharaoh made Joseph governor of Egypt, "he took the ring from his hand, and put it on Joseph's. He clothed him in fine linen and put a gold chain round his neck." (Gen. 41,42) Sandals were worn by the wealthy while the poor and slaves went barefoot.



*Return of the Prodigal Son*

### **The Prodigal Son — Symbol of God's Mercy Towards the Sinner**

The parable of the Prodigal Son has a deep symbolic meaning. When we ponder it, we spontaneously perceive that the Prodigal Son is none other than every person who through a sinful life has become estranged from God. For this reason, the parable is very real to us; it is the story of our lives. It is a symbol of our infidelity to God. But it is also the symbol of God's unbounded mercy toward us. Today, as the world teems with prodigal sons and daughters this parable is dramatized in countless millions. Every person is either that older son who is ever faithful to his father or that younger son who only through hard and painful experience becomes convinced that outside the father's house there is no happiness.

The parable teaches us that God forgives and mercifully receives even the greatest sinners, if they repent and are sorry for their sins. The history of the human race is nothing but the history of God's mercy. "The mercy of the Lord is from eternity to eternity upon them that fear him." (Psalm 103,17)

## **The Spirit of the Service of the Sunday of the Prodigal Son**

The entire service of this Sunday portrays in beautifully poetic fashion the story of the wayward son, the nostalgic longing of the sinful soul for God, its misery and sorrow over its fall, its sincere contrition and repentance, and merciful love of the heavenly Father. Even the melodies of this day express the cry of a repentant soul.

Holy Church, in order to remind us that we are all exiles on this earth and far away from our heavenly home, prescribes that on this day we sing the most beautiful and moving hymn of longing and homesickness for the fatherland known to history. This is the hymn the Israelites sang in the Babylonian Captivity. This hymn of longing and homesickness is Psalm 137. In the Matins service of this Sunday, the following versicles of this Psalm are sung:

“By the rivers of Babylon, we sat, and wept as  
we remembered Sion.

“And they who had led us away, said:  
‘Sing us a song of Sion.’

“How can we sing a song of the Lord in a  
foreign land?

“O miserable daughter of Babylon, a blessing  
on him who shall repay you with what you  
have done to us.

“A blessing on him who shall seize and dash  
your babies on the rocks.” (Psalm 137)

This Psalm has its own characteristic melody. Every versicle of this Psalm ends with the moving and protracted singing of the “Alleluia” which is repeated three times. This Psalm is also sung on Meatfare and Cheesefare Sundays.

Out of longing for God there is born within the heart of the sinner the same sorrow over his sinful state as the Prodigal Son experienced. In the first stichera from Solemn Vespers of the Sunday of the Prodigal Son we sing:

“I have journeyed into a land of sin and  
animals, and have sown sin and reaped its ears  
with the scythe of laziness; and with my hands  
I gathered my deeds into sheaves, but did not  
place them on the threshing floor of repen-  
tance. But I beg You, O Divine Husbandman to

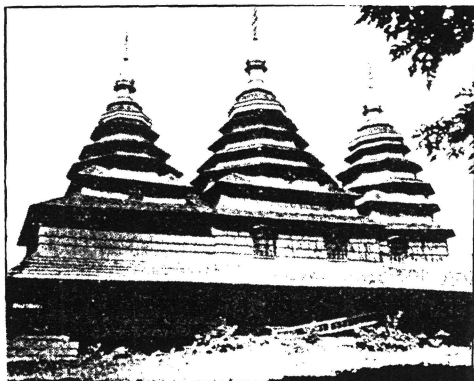
winnow the chaff of my deeds with the breeze  
of your compassionate love; and fill my soul  
with the wheat of forgiveness. Store me in  
your heavenly garner, and save me.”

An awareness of one's own misery induces sincere sorrow  
and repentance, as well as a desire to beg God for forgiveness  
and mercy. These sentiments are expressed in the following  
troparion:

“Hasten to open to me your fatherly arms for  
waywardly have I loved my life; but since You  
are infinitely rich in mercy, O Saviour, do not  
despise my impoverished heart, for to You, O  
Lord, I cry in repentance: I have sinned, O  
Father, before heaven and before You.”

And where there is sorrow for sin and repentance there  
one will find the ever generous mercy of God to which the  
following stichera of Solemn Vespers sings praises:

“Let us, brothers and sisters, learn the meaning  
of this mystery: When the Prodigal Son re-  
nounced his sinful life and returned to his  
father's house, the all good father ran out to  
meet him, kissed him, and again restored him  
to his glory. And he prepared a banquet by kill-  
ing the fatted calf, which is a mystery to the  
inhabitants of heaven, so that we may worthily  
dwell with the Father, Lover of Mankind, who  
killed the calf, and with the Sacrifice — the  
Saviour of our souls.”



*Wooden Church in Western Ukraine, 1882*



*Cathedral of Our Saviour, Chernihiv, Ukraine (1024-31)*

## Souls' Days

*"Remember, O our Saviour, the fathers, and forefathers, grandfathers and ancestors from the first to the last..." (4th Ode of the Canon in the Matins of Saturday of Meatfare)*

Holy Church, as the Mystical Body of Christ, unites all her faithful whether here on earth or in heaven or in purgatory where they are making reparation for faults committed in this life. Thus we speak of the Church Militant, the Church Triumphant and the Church Suffering. All the members of this threefold Church are joined together by the same bond of love of God and of neighbor. This union of the faithful on earth, the blessed in heaven and the suffering souls in purgatory, we call the Communion of Saints. This dogma teaches that the blessed in heaven can and do help those on earth and those in purgatory by interceding for them before God, while those in purgatory can pray for us, but cannot help themselves, because their time of meriting has already ended. However, we on earth can assist them by our prayers, good works and, above all, by the sacrifice of the Divine Liturgy.

The ancient Church practice of praying for those who have departed into eternity is based on this dogma of the Communion of Saints. Referring to this practice, the Second Vatican Council in the decree "On the Church" says: "Fully conscious of this communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the pilgrim Church from the very first ages of the Christian religion has cultivated with great piety the memory of the dead." (§50)

Although the Church remembers the souls of the departed faithful in her daily prayers and services, nevertheless, like a good Mother, she still assigns special days in the Liturgical Year on which she commemorates and prays for them. These days are called Souls' Days or memorial days.

## All-Souls Saturdays

### 1. **Saturday — a day of prayer for departed souls.**

In the Liturgical Year not only is every day dedicated to some festival or saint, but also each weekday has its own patron.

On Monday, holy Church pays homage to the angelic choirs, who occupy first place in heaven next to the most Holy Mother of God. Tuesday is dedicated to St. John the Baptist, the symbol of all the prophets. Wednesday commemorates the betrayal of Jesus Christ and the beginning of His passion, and also venerates the life-giving Cross on which He died. On Thursday, the Church venerates the holy Apostles and St. Nicholas. On Friday, she celebrates the memory of the passion of Christ and His death on the Cross.

On Saturday, God rested after He created the world and Jesus Christ rested in the tomb, after having accomplished the salvation of the world; hence, Saturday became the symbol of eternal rest and happiness in God. For this reason, the Church dedicates Saturday to all the souls, who have gone into eternity, but have not yet entered into eternal rest with the Blessed in heaven. The Blessed Mother of God does not have any special day in the week dedicated to Her, because the Church venerates Her every day of the week in Her services. Three days in the week — Wednesday, Friday and Sunday — the most Pure Virgin Mary is glorified in a special manner because of her active participation in the sufferings, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### 2. *Meatfare Saturday* —

Besides commemorating the faithful departed every Saturday of the week, the Church set aside certain Saturdays in the Liturgical Year whose services are exclusively dedicated to the commemoration of the departed and to prayers for them. These Saturdays are called memorial Saturdays, or All-Souls' Saturdays. These Saturdays include the Saturday before Meatfare Sunday, the second, third and fourth Saturdays of the Great Fast and the Saturday before Pentecost Sunday.

Meatfare Sunday commemorates the Last Judgement. For this reason, on the preceding Saturday we pray "for all Christians who have fallen asleep from time immemorial", that is,



for all those who have died or perished at any time or place, and for whom perhaps no one prays, so that they all may stand, on the day of the Last Judgement, at the right hand of the Eternal Judge.



### **3. The Second, Third and Fourth Saturdays of the Great Fast**

The Great Fast is not only a time for fasting and penance, but also a time for praying for the departed souls. For this purpose, three Saturdays during the Lenten season are dedicated to the memory of the departed. In earlier times during the Great Fast, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated only on Saturday and Sunday, while on the other days only the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts was offered. But that the departed souls might not be deprived of the graces and merits of the Divine Liturgy, during the Great Fast, Saturday was designated especially for the commemoration of the dead.

### **4. Saturday before Pentecost Sunday**

The descent of the Holy Spirit on the fiftieth day after the resurrection was the final act of the redemption of mankind. Hence, the Church wishing the departed souls to have a share in the graces of redemption honors their memory on this Saturday. The Monastic rule of the Studites, written about the year 980 at the monastery of Studion, in Constantinople, states that on the Saturdays before Meatfare and Pentecost Sundays all the monks went to the cemetery to pray for their departed brothers.

### **5. The Saturday before the feast of St. Demetrius**

The Euchologion of Peter Mohyla tells of a commemoration of the departed souls on the Saturday before the feast of St. Demetrius. However, this commemoration is neither a custom of the Eastern Church nor of our Ukrainian people but came to us from the Church of Moscow. The basis of this memorial service was the victory of the Grand Prince,

Demetrius Ivanovych, over the Tartar Khan Mamai on the eighth of September, 1380 in the Kulykov Field. Prince Demetrius Donsky (1362-1389) after the glorious victory ordered an annual commemoration of the soldiers who fell in that battle. In time they began to commemorate also those who were not soldiers, and the day of commemorating the departed souls became the Saturday before the feast of St. Demetrius — perhaps because St. Demetrius himself was a soldier.

## **Other Memorial Days**

### **1. The Third, Ninth and Fortieth Days**

In our Church the ancient custom still prevails of commemorating the dead on the third, ninth and fortieth day after their death. These memorial days, called The Third Day, The Ninth Day and The Fortieth Day, date back to apostolic times. The Lenten Triodion in the synaxary (i.e., a spiritual instruction) of the Saturday of Meatfare gives the following explanation for commemorating the dead on these days: “We commemorate the deceased on the third day of his departure, because on the third day the countenance of the deceased changes; on the ninth day because the whole body decomposes except the heart; and on the fortieth day because the heart decomposes.”

The Euchologion of Peter Mohyla attaches a spiritual meaning to these memorial days: “The commemoration of the third day signifies that the deceased believed in Christ, who rose from the dead on the third day, also that the deceased observed the three theological virtues: faith, hope and love in their entirety. By the commemoration of the ninth day we implore the Lord God through the intercession of the heavenly choirs of angels to grant repose to the souls and to give him the place with the saints which was destined for the fallen angels. The commemoration of the fortieth day reminds us of the forty day fast of Christ, and the forty days he remained on earth after His resurrection; it also recalls the forty-day fast of Moses and Elias.”

The above mentioned commemorations are also called “Sorokousty”. The word “sorokoust” literally means: “forty mouths” (sorok = forty; ust = mouth), i.e., a prayer offered by forty mouths or by forty priests. To honor the deceased

members of their families worthily, the custom developed of holding services for them in the great cathedral churches on the third, ninth, and fortieth day after their death, with forty priests participating in the celebration. The wealthier people



had this service of “Forty Mouths” offered not only in forty churches at the same time, but also through forty days, so that in all, 1,600 commemorations were made. During the service of the Sorokousty, the diptychs were read, that is, the list of the names of the deceased. Today we call this Sorokousty service simply special prayers offered for the deceased during the Great Fast.

In times past it was customary among our Ukrainian people to place a bowl of kolyvo on the tetrapod at the Parastas or Panakhyda service. Kolyvo, is derived from the Greek word "kolyba" which means boiled wheat mixed with honey. The wheat signifies that the body of the deceased will one day rise, just as the seed of wheat when sown in the ground seems to die, yet sprouts and brings forth fruit. The sweetness of the honey symbolizes everlasting joy and happiness in heaven. Three loaves of bread along with the kolyvo placed on the tetrapod, signified an offering, a sacrifice for the deceased. This practice was approved and recommended by the Synod of Lviv (1891) (Title XII, Ch. 1, p. 2).

## **2. Anniversaries of Death and Burial**

Another manifestation of our love for those who have gone into eternity are the prayers offered on the anniversaries of their death or burial. This is a Christian custom worthy of praise — to have a Divine Liturgy, Parastas or Panakhyda, celebrated on these anniversaries. In this way we demonstrate our love and our gratitude towards our dearly-beloved departed.

## **3. The Day following the Feast of the Patron Saint**

The Synod of Lviv notes that it is a custom in our Church on the day following the feast of the patron saint to celebrate a Divine Liturgy and the service for the dead. If a Divine Liturgy for the dead cannot be said on that day, then the commemoration must be transferred to the next nearest day. (Title XII, Ch. 1)

## **4. Visiting Processions to the Cemetery during Eastertide**

Our people had a beautiful custom of going in procession to the cemetery on the second or third Sunday during Eastertide, or on the Sunday of St. Thomas, placing loaves of bread on the graves, and celebrating a Panakhyda service. This practice symbolizes the desire of the living to share the joy of Christ's Resurrection with their beloved departed.

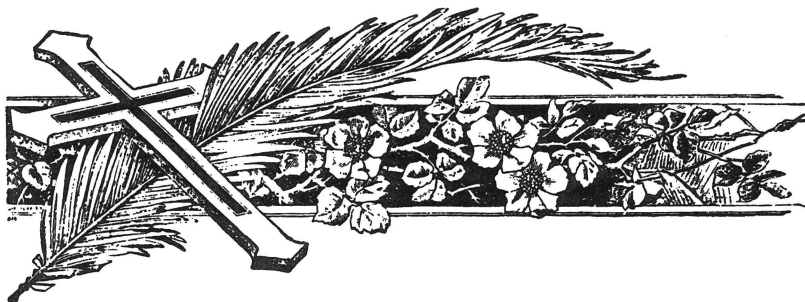
## **5. Memorial Service at the Graves of Heroes**

Another custom developed recently in Western Ukraine, is that of going in procession on Pentecost Sunday to the graves of those who have given up their lives for their coun-

try, and celebrating the Panakhyda service there for the repose of their souls.

### **Kontakion of the Deceased**

**“Grant rest, O Christ, to the departed soul of your servant, where there is no pain, nor sorrow or mourning, but life everlasting.”**



## The Sundays of Meatfare and Cheesefare

*“The Lord is coming and who will not fear Him? Who will be able to appear before His face? O my soul, prepare for this encounter.” (Ode 3 of the Canon in the Matins of the Sunday of Meatfare)*

The parable of the Prodigal Son, read on the preceding Sunday, portrays in a symbolic way the unfathomable mercy of God who accepts even the greatest sinner that repents and is sorry for his sins. However, to prevent man from sinning boldly and presuming on God's mercy, holy Church in the two succeeding Sundays sets before our eyes two truly dramatic scenes as a warning: the day of the Terrible Judgment and the banishment of our First Parents, Adam and Eve, from paradise. These two staggering scenes depict the justice of God in all its severity. The Gospel of Meatfare Sunday describes the day of the Terrible Judgment, while Cheesefare Sunday laments the expulsion of our First Parents from paradise.

On the Sunday of the Prodigal Son the Church spoke to us, saying: Wayward children, turn away from the path of sin and in all humility and repentance return to the father's house, for our Heavenly Father is infinitely merciful and He will forgive you also. The Sundays of Meatfare and Cheesefare, on the other hand, warn us in threatening tones: The Lord God is not only infinitely merciful, but also infinitely just, therefore, do not toy with sin but fear the severe hand of God's justice and punishment.

The day of Judgment reminds all of us about the strict and comprehensive account we shall all have to render concerning our life. The quick and very severe punishment of God that fell upon our First Parents because of one single grievous sin



*by S. Hordynsky*

should convince us that with God there is no playing games. Both Sundays, therefore, point out to us the need of amendment of life, sorrow for sins, fasting and penance, for only in this way can we hope to obtain the mercy of God on the day of the Terrible Judgment.

## **Meatfare Sunday**

### **What do we mean by “meatfare”?**

The week following the Sunday of the Prodigal Son is called Meatfare week and it terminates on the Sunday called Meatfare Sunday. Meatfare Sunday is the last day on which it was still permissible to eat meat before the Great Fast. Meatfare means “farewell to meat.” Hence, the name “meatfare” Sunday. Of course, we are speaking here of the time when the Great Fast was observed in all strictness.

### **The service of Meatfare Sunday:**

The Sunday of Meatfare is also called the Sunday of the Terrible Judgment. In this day’s Gospel Christ speaks of the Terrible Judgment, of the reward of the righteous, and the eternal punishment of the wicked. The entire service of this day is devoted to the Last Judgment. By recalling the manner in which the Terrible Judgment will be carried out, this service is designed to fill us with salutary fear, sorrow for our sins, and to stress the importance of good works, especially works of mercy.

No one shall escape this Judgment. All our deeds will be exposed and rewarded or punished. This is clear from the following stichera, taken from the solemn Vespers of that Sunday: “The books will be opened and the acts of men will be revealed before the unbearable judgment seat: the whole vale of sorrow shall echo with the fearful sound of lamentation, as all the sinners, weeping in vain, are sent by your just judgment to everlasting torment. Therefore, we beseech you, O compassionate and loving Lord: Spare us who sing your praise, for you alone are rich in mercy.”

“The trumpets shall blow, the graves shall be opened and all mankind shall rise trembling. Those who have done good shall rejoice with joy, waiting to receive their reward, while those who have done evil shall tremble greatly, moaning and shaking, as they are separated from the elect and sent to suf-



fering. Therefore, O Lord of glory, be compassionate toward us and make us worthy to be counted among those who love You.”

Everyone shall appear at the Terrible Judgment where they shall be no respect for persons, as the following hymn of the canon of the Matins service of that Sunday makes clear: “The day is approaching, already at the door is the judgment! O Soul, where kings and princes, the rich and the poor gather, where all people shall be judged and receive according to their deeds.” (Ode 4)



*Wooden Church in Western Ukraine (19th c.)*

## **Cheesefare Sunday**

### **What is meant by “cheesefare”?**

Holy Church in gradually preparing us for the fast, permits us to eat meat for the last time on Meatfare Sunday. During Cheesefare week, however, she permits us to eat only dairy products. Just as we bid farewell to meat on Meatfare Sunday, so too we bid farewell to dairy products on Cheesefare Sunday. Hence, the name Cheesefare Sunday. Our people called

this week cheese-or butter-week. This Sunday was the last day for pre-lenten amusements.

In Western Europe our pre-lenten merrymaking was called a "carnival", a word similar in meaning to meatfare. It is derived from the Italian words "carne vale" which literally means "O flesh, farewell!" In the Latin Church, the Great Fast begins on the Wednesday of our First Week of Lent, or Ash Wednesday. On this day, ashes are sprinkled on the heads of the faithful as a sign of penance. In the Latin Church meat may be eaten and merrymaking is permitted until this day. In some places this pre-lenten revelry is very riotous and rowdy.

The practice of Cheesefare week and Cheesefare Sunday is very ancient. It was mentioned by Theophilus, the patriarch of Alexandria (†412). However, it is known that even before that time Meatfare week and Meatfare Sunday had already been established. The synaxary of Cheesefare Saturday states that in the opinion of some writers Cheesefare week received the force of law under the Greek Emperor Heraclius (610-641). For six years he had carried on war with the Persian King, Chosroes, without success. Finally, he made a promise that if he won the war, he would abstain from eating meat for a whole week before the Great Fast.

On the Saturday before Cheesefare Sunday, in order to provide us with an example and an incentive for fasting and penance, holy Church celebrates the memory of those men and women who, from earliest times, devoted their lives to prayer, fasting and penance in monasteries or as hermits in the desert.

The liturgical service of Cheesefare week begins more and more to embody the theme of fasting, especially on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. On Tuesday of Cheesefare week during the Vesper service ritual, bows and prostrations are prescribed which are continued throughout the lenten season.

### **The Ceremony of Forgiveness on Cheesefare Sunday**

In ancient times in Eastern monasteries a beautiful custom existed in which the rite of mutual forgiveness on Cheesefare Sunday was performed. This rite of forgiveness was carried out in the evening, following a modest repast. All the monks in the presence of the faithful asked pardon of one another for



*By Julian Bucmaniuk*

past offences, then embraced, and gave each other the kiss of peace. The faithful did the same among themselves. In some places, while this rite of forgiveness was being carried out, the stichera of the Pasch (Resurrection) was sung: "Today the sacred Pasch has been shown forth to us..." The last stichera ends with an appeal for mutual forgiveness: "and let us embrace one another and say: 'Brethren' even to those who hate us, and let us forgive all things..." The singing of the sticheras of the Pasch (Resurrection) was to signify that just as during the season of Pasch or Eastertide, so now at the threshold of the Great Fast we should mutually ask pardon for offences for the sake of Christ who fasted, suffered, and rose for our sake.

This very moving rite of forgiveness was still observed at the Kievan Pecherska Lavra until the Communists took over the government. Here also, the monks first had a meager pre-lenten repast, after which all superiors and monks donned their mantles and proceeded to the church. All the superiors of the Lavra, from the highest to the lowest, stood side by side in the middle of the church and the whole monastic community, consisting of several hundred members, one by one approached the superiors, then kneeling, they kissed each other three times while saying, "Forgive me, Father," or "Forgive me, Brother." During this time, the choir sang the stichera taken from the solemn Vespers of Cheesefare Sunday: "Adam sat opposite paradise bewailing his nakedness..." After the completing of the ceremony, all departed in silence.

Truly, these four pre-lenten Sundays have a deep significance for our spiritual life. For whoever beats his breast as did the Publican and learns humility from his example; whoever learns from the parable of the Prodigal Son to trust in God's mercy; whoever on Meatfare Sunday, after meditating on the Terrible Judgment, is seized with fear of God's justice, which fell so severely upon our First Parents, as we have seen in the service of Cheesefare Sunday — for him the fast will not be so terrible. Rather, he will understand that it is necessary for his heart and soul. He will willingly fast and make prostrations, knowing that fasting and sorrow for sins can best prepare him for the feast of the Resurrection of our Lord.

## **A Stichera from the Aposticha of the Vespers of Cheesefare Sunday**

“Your grace has shone forth, O Lord, it has shown forth and given light to our souls. Behold, now is the acceptable time, now is the season for repentance. Let us cast aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, that having sailed across the great sea of the Fast we may reach the third-day Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, Saviour of our souls.”



*A copy of the Miraculous Icon of Our Lady of Zhyrovytsi*

## The Holy Great Fast — Institution and Duration

*“Fasting is not a new invention, but a treasure received from the Fathers. All that is ancient is worthy of praise. Respect the antiquity of fasting! It is as old as man himself.” (St. Basil, On Fasting I)*

The Great Holy Fast, called also the Forty Days Fast, is one of the oldest and most sacred Christian practices. The history of the Great Fast is long and rich in tradition, dating from Apostolic times. The pre-paschal fast is called Great, not only because of its duration but also because of its significance in the life of the Church and of every Christian.

The Fathers of the Church have the greatest respect and the highest praises for the holy fast. Regarding its antiquity, St. Basil (329-379) wrote: “Allow me again to appeal to history and to recall that fasting is very old and that all the saints observed it as though it were an inheritance from parents, transmitted from father to son. Thus did this treasure come down to us as an unbroken tradition.” (On Fasting I)

Let us examine the development and duration of this spiritual treasure of the Church.

### How Did the Pre-Paschal Fast Develop?

From Apostolic times, the Apostles and the first Christian community began to replace the day of the Jewish Passover with that of the commemoration of the passion and death of our Lord. For them, the anniversary of the death of Christ was a very sad day, so to celebrate it worthily, they fasted on that day. Thus the original celebration of the Christian Pasch (Passover) began with a fast. This was the Pasch of the



*The Vydbetsky Monastery near Kiev*

crucifixion. According to the testimony of St. Irenaeus (125-203), which the Church historian, Eusebius (260-340) mentions, the present Forty Days Fast can be traced back to a time when fasting was restricted to one or two days. This fast was not regarded as a pre-paschal fast but as the Pasch itself. According to this testimony some kept the Paschal fast for one day, others for two, others even more, and some fasted forty hours. (History of the Church, 5,24)

In post-apostolic times the Church of the second and third centuries began to attend not only to the sad anniversary of the death of Christ, but also to the joyful anniversary of His Resurrection, so that along with the Pasch of the Crucifixion, the Pasch of the Resurrection with the elimination of the paschal fast slowly gained prominence. Even in apostolic times some had already begun to abandon the fast on the very day of the Jewish Pasch (Passover), and others on the following Sunday. According to the testimony of the historian Socrates (379-440), those who celebrated the Pasch together with the Jews, that is, on the fourteenth day of Nisan, affirmed that this had been handed down to them by the Apostles and the evangelist St. John; those who celebrated the feast of the Pasch on the Sunday following the Jewish Pasch, maintained that they had received this custom from Sts. Peter and Paul. "Neither one," remarks Socrates, "can produce any written documents to confirm their positions." (History of the Church, 5,22)

From this disputes arose between those who celebrated the Pasch with the Jews and those who celebrated it the following Sunday. These long disputes were finally resolved by the Council of Nicea (325).

The canonical documents, of the third century speak of the time when the paschal fast ended. According to the canons of Hippolytus, the solemn conclusion of the fast took place at the dawn of Resurrection Day; according to the Didascalia, at the third hour of the night; and according to the Apostolic Constitutions, at cock-crow.

### **The Duration of the Great Fast**

In the third century, the pre-paschal fast in some Churches lasted for a whole week, the week that today we call Passion Week. Toward the end of the third century the Great Fast had been extended to forty days. The first clear testimonies concerning the forty days' pre-paschal fast date from the fourth century. The first testimony is presented to us by the Council of Nicea, which states that local synods should convene "once before the Forty Days Fast, so that after removing all disorders, a pure gift may be offered to God, and they should convene one other time in the autumn." (can. 5)

Although in the fourth century the Forty Days Fast became a recognized practice, nevertheless, it is not yet clearly defined, nor is it generally accepted. In certain places a fast still is observed which falls between the ancient short fast and the Forty Days Fast, namely, the twenty-day fast. This fast was observed, especially in the West, where the Forty Days Fast appeared at a much later date than in the East.

Referring to the duration of the fast before the Pasch (Easter) in various countries, the historian Socrates, reports: "The fast before the Pasch is observed variously in localities; namely, in Rome, before the Pasch the faithful fast for three weeks, except Saturdays and Sundays. In Illyrium, throughout all Greece and Alexandria they fast for six weeks before Easter and this is called the Forty Days Fast. In other places, the people fast seven weeks before the feast of the Pasch." (History of the Church. 5,22)

In Egypt, important testimony regarding the gradual transition from the short fast to the Forty Days Fast is found in the paschal letters of St. Athanasius the Great (c. 297-373). In 329, in the first of these letters, he does not specifically mention the Forty Days Fast but speaks only of the beginning of the "holy fast" associated with the Monday of Passion Week. In the eleventh paschal letter of 340 written in Rome and ad-





*The Church of the Patronage of the Most Holy Mother of God  
in Kharkiv, Ukraine (1689)*

dressed to bishop Serapion of Thmuis, who in the absence of St. Athanasius had governed the Church in Egypt, St. Athanasius gives the following instruction: "Notify the brethren regarding the Forty Days Fast and at the same time instruct them that when the whole world fasts, we alone, who live in Egypt should not expose ourselves to ridicule by not fasting, but rather rejoicing during that time." In the nineteenth letter of 346, St. Athanasius speaks of the observance of the Forty Days Fast as an indispensable condition for a worthy celebration of the Pasch (Easter): "He who neglects the Forty Days Fast and enters without reflecting the holy of

holies with an impure heart, he does not celebrate the feast of the Pasch."

Wherever the custom of the six week fast was in practice, it began on the Monday of the second week of our present day Fast. At the time this practice prevailed, the first week of the Forty Days Fast had not yet become an integral part of the fast.

According to an ancient tradition of the Eastern Church, Saturdays and Sundays were not regarded as fast days. Therefore, so that the total number of fast days would be forty, the fast was extended from six to seven weeks. By the end of the fourth century the pre-paschal fast or Forty Days Fast had already become an accepted practice in both the Eastern and Western Churches.

### **Is the Number "40" to be Taken Literally or Symbolically**

Although we speak of a "forty day fast", nevertheless in the Eastern Church this forty day fast lasts only thirty-six and a half days. Seven weeks of fast, excluding Saturdays and Sundays, leaves only thirty-five days. To this number Holy Saturday and half the night before Easter must be added. But this still leaves thirty-six and a half days of fast which constitutes one tenth of the whole year.

The Latin Church has a six week fast, including Saturdays, so that even in the West the Quadragesima (or Forty Days Fast) consisted of only thirty-six days. Therefore, in order to have a full forty days fast, the Latin Church in the seventh century added still another four days to the beginning of the fast. The Latin Church therefore, begins her fast on "Ash Wednesday", that is, the Wednesday of our first week of the fast.

From ancient times the number "40", like the numbers 3, 7 and 9, was regarded as having a symbolic meaning, and it is in the symbolic rather than the literal sense that "40" days of the pre-paschal fast must be understood. In the Old Testament we read about the Flood which lasted for 40 days (Gen. 7,4), the forty years that the Israelites wandered in the wilderness (Nm 14,33), the forty days fast of Moses, before he received the tablets of the law from God (Ex. 34,28), and the 40 days journey of Elias to the mountain Horeb (I Kings 19,8). In the

New Testament, the Gospels speak of the fortieth day on which Joseph and Mary presented the child Jesus in the temple, the 40 days fast of our Lord in the desert (Mt. 4,2), and the 40 days sojourn of our Lord on earth after His resurrection (Acts 1,2).

Holy Church from the very beginning sanctified the number "40". During the first centuries, the practice of a forty day penance was customary. This was followed by the Forty Days Fast before the Pasch (Easter). In our Rite, a child is brought to church forty days after its birth so that the rite of Churching may be performed over it; also on the fortieth day after death, we commemorate the dead.



*The Virgin Hodigitria of Krasiw (15th C).*

# The Purpose of the Great Fast

*"Because we did not fast we were banished from paradise. So then let us fast so as to return back to paradise."  
(St. Basil, On Fasting I)*

Although our time has brought with it many changes in church laws, traditions, and discipline, and the Second Vatican Council has relaxed the rules for fasting, including the Great Fast, nevertheless, the Forty Days Fast still has significance for our spiritual life. For various reasons, today we may be unable to fast in the same way as our ancestors did; yet even today we are obliged to a spiritual fast — that is, we are obliged to refrain from sin, and from giving in to our evil inclinations. We are also obliged to pray and to practice virtue and good deeds. In reality then, the most important goal of the Great Fast is our spiritual renewal.

In the last chapter we discussed the institution and duration of the Great Fast, now we shall speak about its purpose as recorded in three different periods of history:

## 1. Apostolic Times:

For the Apostles and First Christians, the day of the Jewish Pasch was a sorrowful day commemorating the death of Jesus Christ, therefore, they celebrated this day with prayer, contrition and fasting. This association of the Pasch with fasting lasted a long time. Even in the second century one may find the word "Pasch" used to denote "fasting". This practice seems to echo the time when the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ took place on one and the same day. This association of the sad event of Christ's death with the joyful event of His resurrection has left its traces in our Great Saturday services in which the lenten service is merged with the resurrection service.

## 2. The Paschal Fast and the Catechumenate:

The third and fourth centuries witnessed the greatest flourishing of the catechumenate. Catechumens were those who were being prepared for the sacrament of Baptism. This preparation extended over a period of three years and terminated solemnly during the Great Fast. The concluding acts of this preparation were: the giving of a name to the



*By Fr. Juvenal of Studite Fathers*

catechumen at the beginning of the Great Fast, an exorcism of evil spirits which took place daily throughout the whole lenten period, the last instructions in the truths of the holy faith, the final examination and then, the Baptism itself which took place on Great Saturday. Some of these acts were incorporated into the daily service.

To become a Christian and a member of the Church through Baptism was regarded as an important event in the life of the newly-baptized and in the life of the Church. For this reason, this joyful event was usually celebrated on the great feasts of the Pasch (Resurrection), Pentecost or the Theophany. In the third century, the rite of baptism was associated above all with the feast of the Pasch. The catechumens prepared themselves for baptism by fasting and prayer. Under the influence of the catechumenate the pre-paschal fast was extended to forty days. As time went on, the rest of the faithful also began to observe this fast together with the catechumens. St. Justin the Martyr (†167) speaks about this custom of the faithful observing the fast together with the catechumens. He says that those who embraced the Christian faith “were taught to implore God by fasting and prayer for the forgiveness of past sins, and we pray and fast together with them.” (Apol. 1,61)

### **3. The Great Fast — An Endeavor of Soul and Body:**

The institution of the catechumenate contributed not only to the extension of the Great Fast to forty days, but also to the fact that, in time, all the faithful adopted this fast so that it became the pre-paschal fast for the whole Church. Later, when the institution of the catechumenate lost some of its meaning, the Forty Days Fast became an independent ritual. Today, it is observed by the faithful as a time for special prayer, fasting and penance, and as a spiritual preparation for the feast of the Pasch (Resurrection). This attitude of the Church finds its most beautiful expression in our lenten services, customs and practices. We shall mention certain ones here.

#### **a.) Lenten Services:**

The lenten services differ from the ordinary church services in that they include more prayers, more psalms and more readings, especially from the Old Testament. During lenten services the entire Psalter is read twice a week. Predominant throughout these services is the spirit of penance and sorrow for sins. The Lenten sticheras in Vespers and Matins either lament the fall of man into sin, summon us to penance and sorrow, extol the benefits of fasting and good works, or inspire us to master our senses and to practice virtue. “Let us fast in a

manner pleasing and acceptable to God," says one of the stichera of the aposticha in the Vespers of the first Monday, "genuine fasting is alienating oneself from evil, restraining the tongue, putting aside hatred, parting company with concupiscence, falsehood and the breaking of oaths, — abstaining from all these things is real fasting." In the aposticha of Matins of the first Monday, we sing: "The fast has arrived, the mother of purity, the discoverer of sins, the preacher of penance, the companion of the Angels and the salvation of man: Let us, the faithful, cry out: O God, have mercy on us."

#### **b. Lenten Penances and Prostrations:**

In the first centuries of Christianity the practice of public penance for various sins and offences prevailed in the Church. Following the wishes of the Church, many penitents performed their penance during the Great Fast. Just as the faithful adopted the Forty Days Fast from the catechumens, so too, under the influence of Church discipline they began to regard themselves as penitents and to perform various penitential acts during the Great Fast. From this stems the profound penitential spirit of our lenten services.

Closely connected with our lenten services are inclinations. These inclinations are made either by bowing from the waist or to the ground (the low, profound bow or prostration), and they are performed at all lenten services from Monday through Friday.

The prayer of St. Ephrem (†373) with accompanying prostrations merits special consideration. This prayer, repeated at every lenten service, can be regarded the official lenten penitential prayer of our Church, expressing, as it does, the whole content and purpose of the Great Fast. We give it here in its entirety:

"O Lord and Master of my life, drive from me the spirit of discouragement, negligence, ambition and idle talk. (Prostration).

"Grant me, your servant, the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and charity. (Prostration).

"Yes, my Lord and King, grant me to see my own sins, and not judge my brother, for you are blessed forever, and ever. Amen." (Prostration).

The Kievan Metropolitan George (1073) in his "Rules" for priests and laity prescribes for all the faithful to make three hundred prostrations daily during the Forty Days Fast.

**c. The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts:**

A typical lenten service is the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. Already in the first centuries there was a custom during the Forty Days Fast to omit the celebration of the Divine Liturgy because, at that time, it was still linked with agape, that is the love banquet, and this was not in keeping with the spirit of fasting. Furthermore, the Divine Liturgy was regarded as a joyful mystery; for this reason, its celebration was limited to Saturday and Sunday. On the other days of the week, to give the faithful an opportunity to receive Holy Communion, the Divine Liturgy was replaced by other services, from which the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts developed in time. Actually, this is not a Liturgy in the sense of the word, for it does not have the consecration of bread and wine; but rather, it is a Vespers service combined with the rite of Holy Communion, for which the bread was previously consecrated. Hence the name of Presanctified Gifts.

The Council of Laodicea (c. 364) prescribed: "It is not permitted during the Great Fast to offer up the Bread (that is the Holy Liturgy), except on Saturday and Sunday" (rule 49). The Sixth Ecumenical Council of Trullo (691) decreed: "On all the days of the Great Fast, with the exception of Saturday and Sunday, and the feast of the Annunciation, the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts must be celebrated." (rule 52).

When the zeal of the first Christians gradually began to diminish and the custom of daily and frequent Holy Communion was abandoned, the Great Fast became also the time of preparation for a worthy reception of Holy Communion on the feast of the Pasch.

**d. Lenten Sermons:**

In former times, the faithful attended services even twice a day during the Great Fast. At these services, sermons were delivered. St. Basil the Great, during one week in lent,

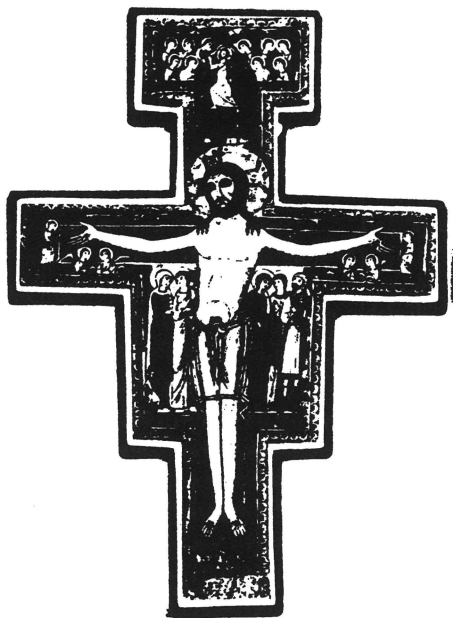


delivered in nine homilies a series of beautiful discourses on the "Hexameron" that is, on the six days of the creation of the world. It was then that he preached twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. He has left us two beautiful discourses on the meaning and benefits of fasting.



## The Practice of the Holy Great Fast

*“The beginning of the fast — it is time for repentance, the day of salvation, O Soul; watch, therefore, and close the doors to the passions and lift up your eyes to God.” (Canon of the Monday Matins of the First Week of Lent).*



The time of the Great Fast is for every Christian a time for spiritual combat in which the soul and body are engaged. The soul engages in this combat by praying and meditating more fervently, keeping watch over the senses, by practicing the

virtues, and by doing good works. This interior disposition of the soul is manifested outwardly in our body through corporal acts of fasting and penance. There is no spiritual fasting without mortification of the body. "The more you subtract from the body," says St. Basil the Great, "the more brightness of spiritual health you will add to the soul. For it is not by increasing bodily strength, but by perseverance and patient endurance in trial that we gain strength against the invisible enemies." (On the Fast I)

The traditional practice of the fast in the Church is carried out in two ways: either by total abstinence from all food and drink for a certain period of time, that is fasting in the strict sense of the word; or, by abstaining from certain foods only for a certain period of time, and this kind of fasting is called abstinence.

Having considered the development, duration and purpose of the Great Fast, we shall consider the manner of fasting.

### **The Original Fast Properly So-Called**

Originally, there was no definite norm or Church rules governing the duration or the manner and practice of the Great Fast. Since this was left to the good will of the faithful, different ways of fasting developed. The historian Socrates (c. 379-440) gives the following testimony regarding contemporary fasting: "One can see also a disagreement about the manner of abstinence from food, as well as about the number of days. Some wholly abstain from things that have life; others feed on fish only of all living creatures; many together with fish, eat fowl also, saying that according to Moses, these were likewise made out of the waters. Some abstain from eggs, and all kinds of fruits; others partake of dry bread only; still others eat not even this; while others having fasted till the ninth hour (that is, to three o'clock in the afternoon our time), afterwards take any sort of food without distinction." (History of Church, 5,22)

The last words of Socrates in the above testimony indicate that in his time, the essence of fasting was not the kind of food to be eaten, but was rather the duration of the time of total abstinence from food. In other words, the essential thing in fasting was that during the day only one meal was eaten,

usually after three o'clock in the afternoon or after sunset. St. Basil, in his treatise on Fasting says: "You wait till evening to eat, while all day you sit in court." (10) St. John Chrysostom says: "No one among us will think that abstaining once till evening will be sufficient for salvation." (On Genesis, hom. 4).

Even in monasteries where food was eaten only once a day throughout the year, during the Great Fast the monks did not eat at all for several days.

The pilgrim Silvia Egeria (fourth century) speaking of the monks of Jerusalem says that some of them during the Great Fast "having taken food after the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, do not eat again until Saturday". (28)

### **Abstinence from Certain Foods**

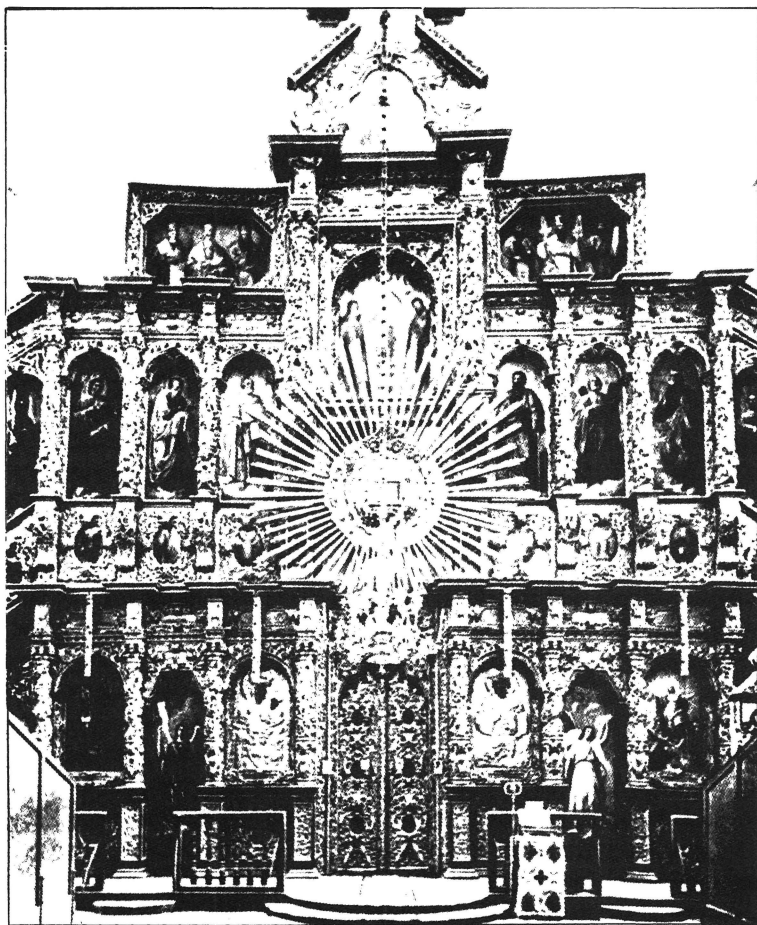
Originally, after a whole day of fasting, the faithful ate every kind of food in the evening. In the fifth century restrictions were placed on certain types of food. This occurred under the influence of the desert monks who took food only once a day and also put restrictions on the type of foods. The common food of the desert monks was bread, water and fruit. The pilgrim Silvia Egeria reports in her Diary that the monks of Jerusalem during the Great Fast "take no leaven bread, no olive oil, nothing which comes from trees, but only water and a little flour soup." (28) Slowly the dry food of the monks became also the common food of the laity during the Great Fast. The Council of Laodicea (c. 364) decreed that the faithful fast on dry food "throughout the entire Forty Days Fast". (50)

### **Saturdays and Sundays of the Great Fast**

In the Eastern Church the Saturdays and Sundays of lent are not regarded as fast days, in the sense that on those days there is no strict fast, i.e., total abstinence from food to a designated time, but even on those days there gradually came into existence the practice of eating only certain types of food, such as — bread, fruits, fish and in some places even milk. This means that on Saturday and Sunday there was no strict fast, but only abstinence.

The Kievan Metropolitan George during the Great Fast permitted all the laity to eat only fish twice a day on Saturday

and Sunday. The Synod of Lviv (1891), speaking of the Forty Days Fast declared: "that, according to the present custom among the people, also Saturdays and Sundays are to be observed as fast days." (Title XI) However, considering the distinction between fasting, in the strict sense, and abstinence, the Synod says: "However, in this matter one must consider local customs and needs." (Title XI)



*Iconostasis in Novhorod (1776)*

## **The Great Fast in our Church**

Among our people the holy Great Fast has always been held in great respect and strictly observed. The Kievan Metropolitan George (1072-1073) commanded such a fast during the Forty Days Fast, i.e., the Great Fast. During the first week of fasting: dry food, i.e., bread, water and fruit could be eaten once a day, without any other drink. During the remaining weeks of the fast on Monday, Wednesday and Friday — dry food was permitted once a day; on Tuesday and Thursday — thin gruel with olive or poppy-seed oil was allowed once a day; on Saturday and Sunday — fish could be eaten twice a day; on the feast of the Annunciation — fish only was permitted.

St. Theodosius Pechersky (c. 1035-1074), following the rule of St. Theodore the Studite, introduced the following fast into the Kievan-Pechersky monastery (also called the “Monastery of the Caves” — “pechera” is the Ukrainian word for “cave”). Throughout the six weeks of the Great Fast food was permitted once a day. During the first week it consisted of dry food, that is — bread and fruit. During the remaining five weeks, on Wednesday and Friday, as in the first week, and on other days — vegetables and porridge without oil was permitted. During the first week of the Great Fast, and afterwards on Wednesday and Friday of the remaining weeks wine was forbidden; exceptions were made, however, for the sick and the aged. Instead of wine during that time, a special drink was prepared which consisted of pepper, caraway seeds and anise. On the other remaining days of subsequent weeks, one glass of wine was allowed. On Saturdays and Sundays food could be taken twice a day with wine. During Passion Week **the fast was even stricter.**

Our Synods, first the Synod of Zamost (1720), then afterwards the Synod of Lviv (1891), relaxed this once very strict fast somewhat for the faithful of our Church. The Synod of Zamost permitted dairy products during the Forty Days Fast. With regard to this matter it issued the following prescription: “Beginning with Monday following the Sunday of Cheesefare to the feast of the Holy Pasch (Easter) and even before that fast one week only with dairy products.” (Title XVI) The Synod of Lviv, besides dairy products during the Great Fast permitted meat also on certain days, after the recitation of certain prescribed prayers.

The greatest relaxation of all fasts in the whole Catholic Church came after the Second Vatican Council. Following the directives of this Council, our Ukrainian Catholic Bishops together with the Major Archbishop Cardinal Joseph approved the relaxation of all fasts for our Church, including the Forty Days Fast. A decree on fasting issued by Major Archbishop Joseph in 1966 prescribed that all the faithful are bound to abstain from meat on all the Fridays of the year. Besides this, they are also bound to abstain from meat and dairy products on the first day of Lent and on Great Friday.

This decree also reminds all the faithful of the continuing obligation of prayer, mortification and the cultivation of the spiritual life: "Let all these great relaxations," the final words of the decree states, "be at the same time a strong incentive and encouragement to repent and to avoid sin and offences against God. Let all faithful Christians remember that the Christian spirit scarcely dwells, if at all, in the family where prayer has become silent, the practice of fasting has disappeared, and even the memory of it is forgotten. Therefore, let the relaxed fast increase our zeal in prayer, meditation and participation in divine services, almsgiving, labor, frequent Confessions and Holy Communions." (Blahovisnyk, Year II, Bk. 2-4)



## The Sunday of Orthodoxy

*"We pay homage to Your undefiled image,  
good Lord, and beg pardon for our faults,  
Christ our God." (Troparion)*

The first Sunday of the Great Fast is called the Sunday of Orthodoxy. What do we mean by "orthodoxy"? The word "orthodoxy" stems from the Greek word "orthodoxia" (orthos=right; doksa=opinion) which signifies the true faith and the true worship of God. We are not speaking here of orthodoxy as we understand it today as being opposed to the Catholic Church, but orthodoxy, as applied to the whole Church of Christ until the schism between the Eastern and Western Churches which occurred in the eleventh century under the patriarch Cerularius (1054). The orthodoxy that we celebrate this Sunday is universal-catholic orthodoxy, professed by the entire Church of Christ of the first centuries in the battle against the heresy of Iconoclasm (Gr — eikon= image; klastes=a breaker; — an image breaking heresy). The Sunday of Orthodoxy is a festival for the whole Church, both Eastern and Western. It is the festive celebration of the decisive victory over Iconoclasm and other heresies.

The Council of Constantinople in the year 842 instituted the Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy and decreed that it be celebrated yearly. The purpose of this feast is to pay solemn public homage and veneration to the holy icons of Jesus Christ, the Blessed Mother of God, and all the Saints. The first celebration of Orthodoxy, that is, the first public veneration of holy icons after the condemnation of the heresy of Iconoclasm, occurred on the first Sunday of Lent in 842 A.D. This Sunday, even today, is called the Sunday of the Veneration of Holy Icons, although this feast bears no relation to the Great Fast. Let us examine closely the history of Iconoclasm and the reason for instituting the Sunday of Orthodoxy.





*Our Lady of Vyshorod (12th c.)*



### **Origin of Iconoclasm**

One of the striking features of the Eastern Church is the ancient and special veneration of sacred icons of Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, the Angels, and the Saints. The Church of Christ deeply respects and honors the holy icons as it also does holy relics. She places them in church for public veneration and recommends that we venerate them privately in our homes, and wear small icons around our necks in the form of little crosses or medals.

Holy icons were accorded public and private homage in the Eastern Church until the reign of Leo III the Isaurian (717-741). Under the influence of two bishops from Asia Minor hostile to the worship of images, he condemned the veneration of holy icons as idolatry. He began his campaign against holy icons by ordering the icon of Jesus Christ to be removed from above the gate of his imperial palace. Later, he issued an imperial decree in 730 prohibiting the veneration of holy icons throughout the empire. This decree marked the beginning of a long, relentless, bitter and bloody campaign against sacred images in the Eastern Church. This struggle with short intervals of peace, lasted over a hundred years and ended in a brilliant victory in favor of the veneration of holy icons.

The emperor's decree ordered all holy icons to be destroyed or burned and their defenders to be cast into prison,

sent away into exile and even tortured. The Patriarch Germanus I (713-730) refused to endorse the Emperor's decree against icons; consequently, the emperor had him removed from office, and appointed in his place the obsequious Patriarch Anastasius (730-754). The Roman popes, first Gregory II (715-731), then later Gregory III (731-741), wrote letters of protest to the emperor and at their Roman synods condemned the war against holy icons.

Emperor Constantine V Copronymus (741-775), son of Leo the Third, obstinately prolonged the iconoclastic war of his father and urged the Church to officially condemn the veneration of holy icons. With this aim in view he summoned the bishops in 754 to Constantinople for a synod, which under his influence prohibited the veneration of holy images.

### **The Condemnation of the Iconoclasm**

Permission to venerate holy icons was granted under the rule of Empress Irene who in 784 removed the iconoclast Patriarch Paul from office, and appointed Patriarch Tarasius (794-806) in his place. With the approval of the Empress Irene and the Apostolic See, he called a Council which met at Nicea in 787. This Council is known in the Church as the Seventh Ecumenical Council. The Church honors the memory of the Fathers who participated in this Council in the month of October.

Regarding the veneration of holy icons, the Council of Nicea adopted the doctrine of St. John Damascene (675-749), the distinguished theologian of the Eastern Church.

The Council clearly stressed the distinction between worship or "latria", denoting the highest worship paid to God alone and "dulia", which denotes the honor and veneration paid the most Pure Virgin Mary, the Angels and Saints. The Council teaches that holy icons are merely visible symbols of invisible persons, to whom we give veneration. When venerating holy icons, we do not worship the paper, canvas or wood on or from which holy icons are produced; we give veneration only to the persons whom they represent. The Council places the veneration of holy icons on the same level as the veneration given the Book of the Holy Gospel, the Cross, and the sacred relics of Saints.

## **The Triumph of Orthodoxy**

With the beginning of the ninth century, during the reign of Leo V the Armenian (813-820), a new persecution against holy icons was launched; it lasted until 842. In that year Empress Theodora restored the use and veneration of holy icons and deposed the iconoclast Patriarch John VII, and in his place installed Methodius I (842-846). Patriarch Methodius I, who was also persecuted and tortured for the cause of holy icons, immediately convoked a synod at Constantinople that finally restored the veneration of holy images. This decisive victory is known as the "Triumph of Orthodoxy" and is celebrated by the Eastern Church each year on the Sunday of Orthodoxy.

Among the staunch defenders of holy icons are the Patriarch Germanus I, St. John Damascene, St. Andrew of Crete, Martyr (†767), St. Theodore Studite (759-826) and Patriarch Methodius I.

Patriarch Methodius I was believed to have composed the "Ceremony of Orthodoxy", a public profession of faith that was read at the Divine Liturgy on the Sunday of Orthodoxy. In the course of time, this "Rite of Orthodoxy" underwent various alterations. This rite also found its way into our native land and was observed in the cathedral churches. This ceremony consists of a profession of faith, a public veneration of the icons of Jesus Christ and the most Holy Mother of God, a prayer of thanksgiving to God for victory over the heresies, prayers for the living and the dead and finally, a proclamation of an anathema upon the heretics.

The spirit that pervades the liturgy of the Sunday of Orthodoxy is one of joy, victory, triumph, honor and veneration for the holy icons. "Today, O faithful, let us clap our hands with joy," says the canon in the first Ode of the Matins service, "and cry: 'How wonderful are Your works, O Christ, and how great Your power, for You bring to fulfillment our unity and harmony.' Come, all you enlightened by God, and let us celebrate this joyous day. Today heaven and earth rejoice and the angelic choirs and assemblies of peoples especially celebrate."

"Today the light of devotion has shone forth to all," we sing in the sticheras of Great Vespers, "banishing the deceit of impiety like a cloud, and illumining the hearts of the faithful.

Come, all you orthodox Christians, let us devoutly fall down before the venerable icons of Christ."

In the Matins service we sing at the sticheras of Praises: "Today is a day filled with joy and gladness, for the true dogma shines with splendor, and the Church of Christ is adorned once more with glorious images, and the unity of the faithful is pleasing to God."

In the eighth Ode of the canon of Matins we read: "Preserving the ancestral laws of the Church, we depict images of Christ and the Saints, and as we kiss them with our lips, in heart and desire, we cry out, all the works of the Lord bless the Lord."

### **The Saturday of St. Theodore Tiro**

Here it may be appropriate to recall briefly the great martyr, St. Theodore Tiro (†306) whose memory the Church honors on the Saturday before the Sunday of Orthodoxy.

Tradition has it that Emperor Julian the Apostate (361-363), when persecuting the Christians, wished to desecrate the Christian fast by ordering all the food in the markets of Constantinople to be sprinkled every day of the first week of the fast with the blood of the pagan sacrifices. The great martyr, St. Theodore Tiro, however, appeared in a vision to the bishop of Constantinople, Eudokius, and warned him of the evil intent of the emperor and told him to notify all the faithful not to buy food at the markets, but instead to eat cooked wheat with honey, which in Greek is called kolyba. Evidently, the Lord wished to show us in this way how He cherished the value of the Christian fast.



# **The Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross**

*“We adore Your cross, Lord, and we  
glorify Your Holy Resurrection”*

The season of the Great Fast is a special time for mortification and penance, both internal and external. Because this spiritual struggle lasts a longer time, it often happens that we begin the first days or weeks of fasting with great zeal and resolution, but then gradually we become physically and spiritually exhausted, weakened and discouraged. Holy Church knowing well the weakness and instability of our human nature, places before our eyes the holy Cross in the middle of the fast — an extraordinarily powerful incentive to motivate us to persevere in our spiritual struggle.

On the third Sunday, or mid-Lent, holy Church encourages us to venerate the Cross of our Lord in a very special manner, so that we may be strengthened in spirit. This Sunday, therefore, is called the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross.

The holy Cross is designed to remind us of God’s infinite love for us, Christ’s suffering for our sake and our obligation to carry our daily cross courageously. Jesus Christ addressed these words to all of us, “If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me... He who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 9,23 and 14,27)

## **The Spiritual Significance of This Sunday**

The Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross reminds us that Christians employ a powerful weapon in their battle with the enemies of his salvation — the Holy Cross. Particular-

ly on this Sunday, the cross is raised before us as a sign of strength, salvation, victory and triumph.

The synaxary — a spiritual instruction — in the Matins service of this Sunday beautifully explains the reasons for venerating the Holy Cross on this day: “On this Sunday, the third Sunday of Lent, we celebrate the veneration of the honorable and Life-Giving Cross, and for this reason: inasmuch as in the forty days of fasting we in a way crucify ourselves...and become bitter and despondent and failing, the Life-Giving Cross is presented to us for refreshment and assurance, for remembrance of our Lord’s Passion, and for comfort... We are like those following a long and cruel path, who become tired, see a beautiful tree with many leaves, sit in its shadow and rest for a while and then, as if rejuvenated, continue their journey; likewise today, in the time of fasting and difficult journey and effort, the Life-Giving Cross was planted in our midst by the holy fathers to give us rest and refreshment, to make us light and courageous for the remaining task... Or, to give another example: when a king is coming, at first his banner and symbols appear, then he himself comes glad and rejoicing about his victory and filling with joy those under him; likewise, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is about to show us His victory over death, and appear to us in the glory of the Resurrection Day, is sending to us in advance His scepter, the royal symbol — the Life-Giving Cross — and it fills us with joy and makes us ready to meet, inasmuch as it is possible for us, the King himself, and to render glory to His victory... All this in the midst of Lent which is like a bitter source because of its tears, because also of its efforts and despondency...but Christ comforts us who are as it were in a desert until He shall lead us up to the spiritual Jerusalem by His Resurrection...for the Cross is called the Tree of Life, it is the tree that was planted in Paradise, and for this reason our fathers have planted it in the midst of Holy Lent, remembering both Adam’s bliss and how he was deprived of it, remembering also that partaking of this Tree we no longer die but are kept alive...”

### **The Spirit of the Liturgy of the Veneration of the Holy Cross**

The services of this Sunday almost make no mention of the Cross as being a symbol of suffering, penance, or humiliation,

but rather extol the holy Cross as a symbol of joy, victory and triumph, which are brought to fulness through the glorious Resurrection.

The dominant hymn for this Sunday is: "We adore Your Cross, Lord, and we glorify your holy Resurrection." Where did this sublime hymn come from? This hymn is taken from the Matins service of Easter Sunday: "Having witnessed the Resurrection of Christ..." This prayer is also recited at every Sunday Matins service. It is a very old prayer; we find it already in the Resurrection or Easter Matins and the Sunday Matins of the ninth century. It was also included in the oldest liturgical services of the monasteries of Mt. Athos. In that resurrectional and profoundly dogmatic prayer we find the very words: "We adore Your Cross..."

Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky, O.S.B.M., in his pastoral letter on "The Veneration of the Holy Cross" says: "The essence of the veneration of the Cross cannot be more clearly and more gloriously expressed than it is in the service of the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross. Our Rite has always joined this veneration of the Cross with the commemoration of the Resurrection. Bowing before the Cross, we pray: 'We adore Your Cross, Lord, and we glorify Your Resurrection.' This is the true Christian meaning of the Cross. Beyond the Cross the Christian sees the glory of the Resurrection and the joy of everlasting bliss."

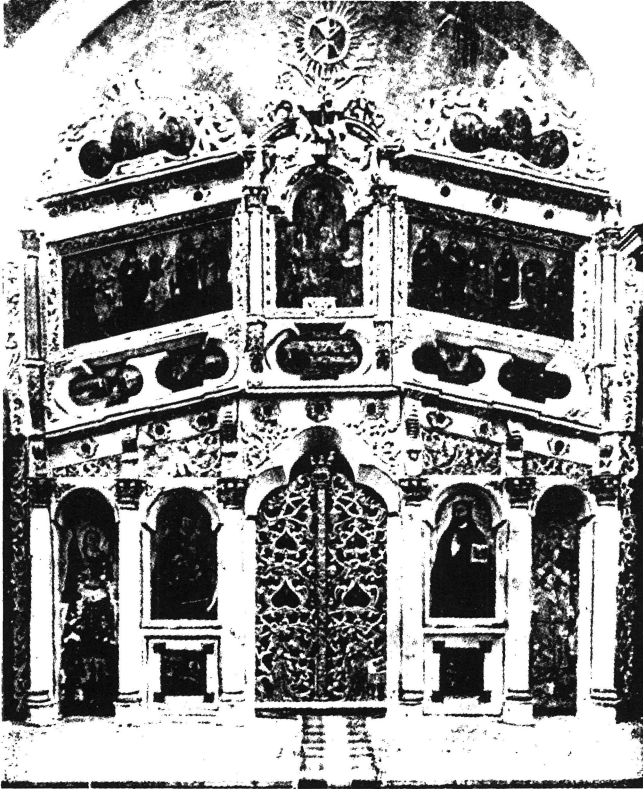
The whole Vespers and Matins services of this Sunday, the sticheras, canon and sessional hymns, are a sublime hymn of praise in honor of the Cross of our Lord. We sing in Great or Solemn Vespers: "Rejoice, O Life-Giving Cross, most beautiful paradise of the Church, tree of Immortality, which gave us the joy of everlasting glory, by which the legions of demons are driven away, the choir of Angels rejoice and the assemblies of the faithful celebrate. You are the invincible weapon, the immovable fortress, the victory of kings, the glory of priests, grant that we also may share the passion of Christ and experience His great mercy."

"Rejoice, O Life-Giving Cross, sure victory of religion, gate of paradise, defense of the faithful, bulwark of the Church. Through You corruption has been overcome, the power of death has been crushed, and we have been lifted up from earth to heaven. You are the invincible weapon, conqueror of demons, glory of martyrs, true ornament of the



religious, and haven of salvation, — O Cross, bestow upon the world Your great mercy.”

In the first Ode of the canon of St. Theodore the Studite, we read, “Today is a day of triumph, for through the Resurrection of Christ death has disappeared, the star of life has shone forth, Adam has been raised and he exults with joy; therefore, let us rejoice singing the song of victory.”



*Iconostasis (18th c.)*

### **The Rite of Venerating the Cross**

On this Sunday a solemn rite of veneration of the holy Cross is carried out during the Matins service in the following manner: After the Vespers service the beautifully decorated Cross is carried from the sacristy and placed on the altar. On

the following day, during Matins service at the Great Doxology, the priest takes the Cross from the altar, places it upon his head and goes out to the middle of the church and there places it on the tetrapod. The troparion "Save your people...", is then sung. After this they sing three times: "We adore Your Cross..." and each time a prostration is made. While the sticheras of the feast are being sung, the faithful come forward and devoutly kiss the holy Cross.

While the faithful are venerating the Cross, the following stichera is sung: "Come, all you faithful, let us adore the life-giving tree, upon which Christ the King of glory willingly stretched out His arms and raising us up, restored us to that original happiness, the enemy stole from us in the past, seducing us by vain pleasures so that we became estranged from God. Come, all you faithful, let us bow down before the tree, through which we have become worthy to crush the heads of invisible enemies. Come, all you nations, let us extol the Cross of the Lord with hymns of praise: Rejoice, O Cross, perfect salvation of fallen Adam. Our most faithful kings glory in you, for by your power they overcame their enemies. Today we Christians with awe kiss you, we glorify the crucified God upon you and say, 'O Lord, crucified on the Cross, have mercy on us, for you are good and you love mankind.'"

Instead of the Trisagion Hymn, at the Divine Liturgy on this day, we sing, "We adore your cross, O Lord..." This hymn in honor of the holy Cross we sing as we bow before the Cross and devoutly kiss it, at the conclusion of each church service throughout the whole week until Friday.

The Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross, indeed, teaches us to understand the great significance the Holy Cross has for us, not only during the Lent, but also throughout our whole life. This Sunday tells us that wherever we find the Cross, there will we find strength, victory, salvation and the pledge of resurrection to eternal life of bliss.

To arouse ourselves to a greater veneration and love for the holy Cross, let us frequently call to mind those profound thoughts expressed by the great venerator of the holy Cross, St. Ephrem the Syrian (†373) in the following hymn:

'The Cross is — the resurrection of the dead.

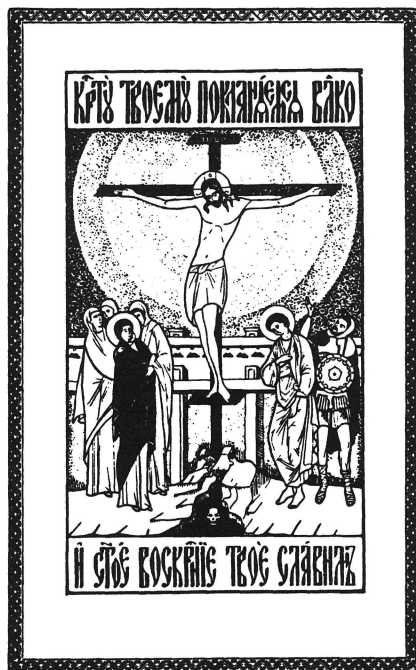
The Cross is — the hope of Christians.

The Cross is — the staff of the lame.

The Cross is — the consolation of the poor.

The Cross is — the dethronement of the proud.  
 The Cross is — the hope of the hopeless.  
 The Cross is — the helm of those who sail.  
 The Cross is — the harbor of the storm-tossed.  
 The Cross is — the father of orphans.  
 The Cross is — the comfort of the afflicted.  
 The Cross is — the protector of youth.  
 The Cross is — the glory of men.  
 The Cross is — the crown of the aged.  
 The Cross is — the purity of virgins.  
 The Cross is — the bread of the hungry and the  
                   fountain of the thirsty.

...Therefore, let us make the sign of this Life-Giving Cross on our forehead, lips and breast... Let us not leave the Cross even for one hour, even for one moment, and let us not do anything without it, but whether we are going to sleep, or getting up; whether we are eating or drinking, whether we are traveling on land, sailing the sea, or crossing rivers, we should adorn all the members of our body with the sign of the Life-Giving Cross."



## The Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete

*"Where shall I begin to lament the  
deeds of my wretched life? How do  
I begin, O Christ, my present  
lamentation?" (Canon)*



The conscientious and faithful observance of the Great Fast to the very end demands from every Christian great strength of spirit and will. Holy Church, desiring that we finish our fasting as zealously as we began it, proposes certain special devotions designed to induce us to fast and do penance during the Forty Days Fast. The observance of the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross as well as those of Matins with Prostrations provide these inducements. The Sixth Ecumenical Council decreed that this Matins service, in which the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete occupies the central place, be celebrated on Thursday of the fifth week of the Great Fast. Customarily, however, this celebration takes place on Wednesday evening.

A special feature of this service is the triple bow prescribed after every troparion of every Ode of the Canon by the Typicon. According to the custom of the Ukrainian Church, however, only one profound bow to the ground occurs. In all, 250 prostrations or profound bows are prescribed. For this reason, the Ukrainians call this Matins service simply "Prostrations". More than any other, perhaps, this service symbolizes the spirit of penance in our Eastern Church.

To enable the reader to develop a better understanding of this penitential service, a few words shall be devoted to the history and spiritual significance of this canon.

### **What Do We Mean by the Word 'Canon' in General?**

A significant portion of every matins service is arranged according to definite rules. For this reason, this section of the morning service is called 'canon', a Greek word meaning "rule", "measure", "norm".

Biblical hymns are the basis of the canon which includes nine odes, the second of which, because of its penitential nature, occurs only during the time of the Great Fast. The originator of the canon is generally believed to be St. Sophronius, patriarch of Jerusalem (†638). At first, the canons were small in content because they consisted of two or three odes. Each ode has an irmos and several verses called troparions. The number of troparions in an ode varies and may be any number from two or three to over ten. St. Andrew of Crete was the first to compose canons consisting of nine odes.

### **The Author of the Great Canon**

St. Andrew of Crete wrote the Great Canon. Who is he and what did he contribute to the Church? St. Andrew was a native of Damascus in Asia Minor. As a young man he made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and there in the year 678, he entered the monastery of St. Sabbas. His piety and keen intellect drew the attention of Theodore, Patriarch of Jerusalem; as a result, the Patriarch made him his secretary. St. Andrew, acting as the representative of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, participated in the Sixth Ecumenical Council, that met at Constantinople. After the Council he served for a time as a deacon at the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Constantinople and had care of the orphans. Later the Patriarch of Constantinople consecrated him archbishop of the city of Gortyn on the Island of Crete. For this reason, he is called St. Andrew of Crete. The date of his death is uncertain. Some writers give the year 712 as the date of his death; others give 740. His memory is celebrated in the Eastern Church on the fourth of July.

St. Andrew distinguished himself as an excellent

preacher, church writer and poet. He composed many church hymns, sticheras and especially canons, of which the Great Canon is the most prominent.

### **The Characteristic Features of the Great Canon**

This canon bears the title "Great" not only because of its truly vast content, for it has as many as 250 troparions, but also because of its profound reflections, deep penitential spirit, and its moral and ascetical significance. The protracted and sad singing of the irmoses and troparions of the canon, along with the many prostrations, imparts to the entire service a profoundly penitential mood. For this reason, the synaxary of this day justifiably says that "it is indeed of all the canons the most sublime", and goes on to point out that it "is so grand and melodious that it is capable of moving the most hardened heart, and of inspiring it with great courage." Already the opening troparions of the canon induce a serious and prayerful mood: "Where do I begin to lament the deeds of my wretched life? How do I begin, O Christ, my present lamentation? But You, O Merciful One, forgive me my offences."

"Go, wretched soul along with your body and confess to the Creator of all. In the future leave your past foolishness and bring to God tears of repentance." (Ode I).

A good or bad example has great influence upon each and everyone of us. For this reason, St. Andrew sets before us many examples and events of the Old and New Testaments, beginning with Adam and Eve to the Ascension of Christ. Using these examples and events he reconstructs the whole history of the fall, the conversion and the contrition of every soul:

"I brought before you, my soul, all the figures of the Old Testament as examples. Imitate the words of the righteous which are pleasing to God, and flee from the sins of the wicked."

In the ninth Ode he says: "I am bringing before you my soul, examples from the New Testament, to lead you to sorrow of heart. Emulate, then, the righteous, avoid sinners, and **regain Christ's grace by prayers, fasts, purity and reverence.**"

The scenes of the Bible pass before our eyes as though on a



*By Peter Andrusiw*

picture screen, and we then relive them deeply as though they were part of our own life:

“Like the thief I cry to you: ‘Remember me!’ Like Peter I weep bitterly, ‘Forgive me, O Saviour.’ Like the publican I plead; and like the adulteress I weep. Accept my lamentation as You once accepted the lamentations of the Chanaanite woman.” (Ode 8)

“Like David I have fallen through wantonness and have defiled myself; may I wash myself with tears also, O Saviour. Like the courtesan I cry to You: ‘I have sinned, against You alone I have sinned. Accept my tears as perfume, O Saviour.’” (Ode 2)

The repentant soul senses his approaching end and God’s Judgment at the very door, and it fears the punishment it deserves: “The end is drawing near, my soul, it is drawing near! But you neither care nor prepare. The time is growing short. Rise! The Judge is near, at the very doors. Like a dream,

like a flower, our life passes; why do you bustle about in vain?" (Ode 4)

"The Lord at one time rained down fire from heaven upon Sodom and destroyed the people because of their terrible sins. But you, my soul, kindled the fire of hell, in which you are about to be tortured." (Ode 2)

"Have mercy on me, O Lord, have mercy on me, I implore you, when you come with your angels to reward us all according to our deeds." (Ode 3)

One can truly say that in every troparion of the canon we engage in sincere dialogue with our soul and with our Creator. The Great Canon resembles a detailed examination of conscience before death and a sincere confession, covering the whole life of each contrite person:

"There is no sin, or act or vice in life that I have not committed, O Saviour. I have sinned in thought, word, deed and desire as no one else ever did." (Ode 4)

"I confess to you, O Christ my King: I have sinned, I have sinned, like Joseph's brothers, who sold the fruit of purity and innocence." (Ode 5)

"I have confessed to You, my Judge, the secrets of my heart. Behold my humility and also my distress, Judge me now. Have pity on me, for You alone are merciful, O God of our Fathers." (Ode 7)

"The profound moral strength and significance of the Great Canon lies precisely in the fact, that while leading us to meditate on our own sins, it does not plunge us into despair and hopelessness, but after inducing sincere sorrow and contrition, it consoles us, lifts us up, inspires us with hope, and points out to us a sure means of salvation — the mercy of God and the intercession of the most Pure Virgin Mary:

"Although I have sinned, O Saviour, I know You are the Lover of mankind. You punish with love and You show mercy graciously. You see my tears and You hasten to me like the father of the Prodigal Son." (Ode 1)

"You are the Good Shepherd; therefore, seek me, your lamb, and do not despise me, although I have gone astray." (Ode 3)

"Spare, O God, spare your creature. I have sinned, forgive me, for You alone are pure by nature. No one is without sin, except You alone." (Ode 5)

"O Mother of God, hope and Mediatrix of those who call





*Cathedral of the Assumption, in Chernihiv (12th c.)*

upon you, relieve me of the heavy yoke of sin, and as our Lady most pure, accept me who repent." (Ode I)

At the end of each ode of the canon, two troparions honor the venerable Mary of Egypt. Later, another author added a third troparion in honor of St. Andrew of Crete.

The Sixth Ecumenical Council prescribed that at this Matins service of the Great Canon, the biography of the venerable Mary of Egypt (†521), written by St. Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, be read. Venerable Mary of Egypt was born in Alexandria, Egypt. For years she led a sinful life until, during a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, she repented of her sinful life and was converted, and retired into the desert where she spent the rest of her life in prayer, sorrowing for her sins and atoning for them. The Church commemorates her on the first of April.

The reading of her life during the matins service is designed, as is the entire Great Canon, to give us an inspiring example of conversion, sorrow and atonement for sin. On the fifth Sunday of Lent the memory of this same Saint is recalled.

## Akathistos Saturday

*“Rejoice, O Mother of the Never-setting Star!  
Rejoice, O Salvation of my soul!  
Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin!”  
(Akathistos to the Mother of God)*

On the fifth Saturday of Lent our Eastern Church has a special service in honor of the most Pure Virgin Mary. This service, which is celebrated only in the Eastern Church, is called akathistos, a Greek word meaning “not sitting”. Hence, the name Akathistos Saturday.

Akathistos Saturday, like the Sunday of Orthodoxy, bears no relation to the Great Fast. It occurs during that time because of historical tradition and practice of the Church. During the Matins service of this Saturday the entire akathistos of the Annunciation of the most Holy Mother of God is sung. This akathistos can be called the symbol and crown of the sublime cult of the Mother of God in the Eastern Church. For this reason, it deserves special attention.

### The Institution of Akathistos Saturday

The church service of this Saturday was instituted in honor of the Mother of God in thanksgiving for her protection of the capital city of Byzantium — Constantinople — against an enemy invasion on three separate occasions. The first invasion occurred during Emperor Heraclius (626), when the Persians launched an attack from the East and the Sketes or Avars from the West, and the city was in grave peril. Patriarch Sergius I (610-639) took the beautifully clothed icon of the most Pure Virgin Mary, called the Odigitria (Greek = a guide), or Our Lady Guide of Wayfarers, and her robe and went in procession around the city. As the procession drew near to the Church of the most Holy Mother of God, situated in the suburb of Blacherna, he soaked the robe of the Mother of



*Details of the Great Panagia (12th c.)*

God in the sea. Immediately a storm arose which sank the enemy's ships. The city was saved. The people, acknowledged this as a miracle performed by the Mother of God assembled in the church at Blacherna, and passed the whole night in prayer, singing the hymn of praise, i.e., the akathistos, in honor of the Mother of God.

The second miraculous event took place some thirty years later, during the reign of Constantine II, Pogonatus (641-668), when the Mohammedans attacked the capital. The third miracle occurred under Emperor Leo the Isaurian (716-750), when the Mohammedans again laid siege to the city with a large naval fleet.

### **The Structure of the Akathistos**

The grateful people after their first deliverance spent the whole night standing in church while they sang a hymn of thanksgiving to the Mother of God; for this reason the hymn is called akathistos and the service is carried out while standing. The synaxary of this Saturday calls the akathistos — a hymn during which there is no sitting, or literally a “non-sitting” hymn.

The Akathistos has its own particular structure. Its thirteen kontakions and twelve ikoses are arranged in the sequence of the Greek alphabet. The shorter hymns of the Akathistos are called kontakions and the longer hymns, ikoses. A kontakion is a Greek word denoting a short hymn, or ode. An ikos is a longer hymn which extols the event and meaning of the feast or sings the praises of some Saint. The ikos always follows the kontakion and is never read without it.

Every kontakion of the Akathistos climaxes with a threefold “alleluia”. Every ikos consists of a short introduction followed by twelve short versicles, each of which begins with the word, “Hail” or “Rejoice”, and ends with the versicle, “Hail, Bride Ever-Virgin.”

The Akathistos to the most Pure Virgin Mary is distinguished for its singularly profound thought and sublime poetic expressions. It is regarded as a masterpiece of church poetry in the Eastern Church. Prince Maximilian of Saxony, a Catholic priest and a great authority on the Eastern Church,

says: "The akathistos hymn belongs to the most celebrated of poetry of the Greek world."

With regard to its contents, the akathistos can be divided into two main parts. In the first part, that is, in the first six kontakions and ikoses, an historical aspect of the life of Jesus Christ and the Blessed Mother of God predominates, while in the second part the dogmatic and moral reflections provide the dominant theme. The kontakions extol the history of the Incarnation of the Son of God, whereas the ikoses extol the privileges and graces of the Mother of God.

To provide the reader with a better understanding of the profound content and the sublime poetry of the Akathistos, we reproduce here in their entirety the first kontakion and the first ikos:

### **Kontakion 1**

"To You, Mother of God, victorious leader of triumphant hosts, we Your servants, delivered from calamity, offer hymns of thanksgiving. In Your invincible power, keep us free from every peril, that we may cry to You: Hail, Bride Ever-Virgin".

### **Ikos 1**

"A chief angel was sent out from Heaven  
To say to the Mother of God, "Hail".  
As he beheld You, Lord, assuming flesh, he was  
amazed and stood still, and with an incorporeal  
voice exclaimed to Her:

"Hail, You from whom grace will shine forth,  
Hail, You through whom the curse will disappear;  
Hail, You who are the resurrection of fallen Adam,  
Hail, You who are the deliverance of Eve's tears;  
Hail, summit inaccessible for mortal man,  
Hail, depth difficult to behold even for angels.  
Hail, since You are the throne of the King;  
Hail, You who bear the One who bears all;  
Hail, star showing forth the sun,  
Hail, womb of divine incarnation,  
Hail, You through whom creation is renewed;  
Hail, You through whom the creator is worshipped.  
Hail, Bride Ever-Virgin".

## **The Author of the Akathistos to the Mother of God**

Church history does not record the name of the author of the Akathistos to the Mother of God, so its authorship remains a disputable question even today. Authorship of this akathistos has been ascribed to various persons. Some assert that the author was the venerable Roman the Melodist (†c. 540). Roman was the first to compose kontakions and ikoses for the various feast days. From him we have the celebrated kontakion of the Nativity of our Lord: "Today the Virgin gives birth to the inconceivable One," and the kontakion of the Resurrection: "Although you descended into the grave, O Immortal One..."

The ancient menaions, that is, the Monthly Books containing the service of each Saint, contains those kontakions and ikoses, which today form the akathistos to the Mother of God, after the sixth ode of the canon, in the service of the Annunciation on March 25. The authorship of these kontakions and ikoses has been ascribed to the venerable George Pisides (7c), a deacon at St. Sophia in Constantinople. He described the war between Byzantium and the Avars, during which the most Pure Virgin Mary miraculously protected the capital. Others are of the opinion that the kontakions and ikoses of the akathistos were originally composed for the feast of the Annunciation and that it was not until later that the akathistos was composed as a separate hymn of thanksgiving to the Mother of God for her special intervention against the enemy. This is evident in the first kontakion which alludes to the intervention of the Mother of God, and refers to a battle, as well as to danger and deliverance.

Still others suggest as the author of the Akathistos to the Mother of God, the Patriarchs Sergius or Germanus (8c) or even the Patriarch Photius (9c).

## **The Spiritual Meaning of the Akathistos**

The melody and profound content of the Akathistos to the Annunciation of the Mother of God is a very powerful means of fostering devotion to the Mother of God, for it incorporates the whole teaching of the Eastern Church concerning Mary. It extols all the principal dogmas relating to the most Pure Virgin Mary, above all, Her Divine Maternity: "Rejoice, for you are the throne of the Lord and King. Rejoice, for you carry Him

who carries the universe. Rejoice, you who gave life to Him who gives life to us." (Ikoses, 1,3)

Mary's immaculate and perpetual Virginity are praised: "Rejoice, O Flower of Incorruption. Rejoice, O Crown of chastity." (Ikos, 7) "Rejoice, for you have reconciled virginity with maternity." (Ikos, 8)

All her virtues are extolled and the most beautiful praises are sung in her honor: "Rejoice, O perpetual glory of the Apostles. Rejoice, unconquerable Strength of ascetics. Rejoice, O unshakeable foundation of the faith." (Ikos, 4) "Rejoice, O Holiest One among the Saints. Rejoice, Tabernacle gilded by the Holy Spirit." (Ikos, 12)

In the Akathistos we find expressed the constant faith of the Church in Mary's protection and her intercession in heaven: "Rejoice, O Bridge which leads from earth to heaven." (Ikos, 3). "Rejoice, Reconciler of the whole world." (Ikos, 3). "Rejoice, O Shelter of the world, wider than the heavens." (Ikos, 6). "Rejoice, O Placator of the just Judge." (Ikos, 8). "Rejoice, for you are our Guarantee of victory. Rejoice, O Salvation of my soul." (Ikos, 12).

In meditating upon the sublime privileges, graces, and role of the Mother of God in our salvation, there naturally arises in our hearts great trust in her intercession and protection, as well as hope of salvation through her. All these sentiments are expressed very beautifully in the concluding kontakion:

"O ever-praised Mother, who gave birth to the Word, holiest of all the Saints, accept our present supplication and deliver us from every affliction, and from everlasting punishment save us, who sing to you: "Alleluia".



## Saturday of Lazarus

*“Your voice, O Lord, destroyed the kingdom of Hades, and by the power of Your word, You raised Lazarus from the tomb after four days. He became the saving pre-figurement of the resurrection...”*  
(Stichera from the Saturday of Lazarus)

Almost every week of the Great Fast has its special liturgical features. The same must be said of its Saturdays and Sundays which are dedicated to some event in the life of Jesus Christ, His Blessed Mother and the Church or the Saints.

The special characteristic of the sixth week of the Forty Days Fast is that it spiritually prepares us for two great and glorious events in the life of Jesus Christ: the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead, to which are dedicated the Saturday before Palm Sunday, and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem of our Lord Jesus Christ, which the Church celebrates on Palm Sunday.

Let us examine closely the spiritual significance of the week of Palm Sunday and the celebration of the Saturday of Lazarus.

### The Week of Palm Sunday

In our liturgical books this week bears the name — the week of palms (i.e., palm branches), flowers or blossom-bearing week. The dominant theme of the services of this week is the ending of the Great Fast and the preparation of the faithful for the great miracle of the raising of Lazarus from the dead and Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Strictly speaking, the Great Fast ends on the Friday of this week. The Saturday of Lazarus is outside the scope of the Great Fast. That this is a concluding service is evident when





*The Raising of Lazarus*

on Friday we sing in the stichera of Vespers: "Having completed the Forty Days Fast for the benefit of our souls, permit us, O Lover of mankind to also see the holy week of Your Passion, so that during this week we may glorify Your majesty and Your incomprehensible Providence regarding us as we sing with one mind and heart: Glory to You, O Lord!"

In the first centuries of Christianity, it was customary for the monks to leave their monasteries during the period of the Great Fast to retire into the desert to spend the Forty Days Fast in prayer and fasting. On the Friday before Lazarus Saturday, however, they returned again to their monasteries. Therefore, in the canon of the Thursday Matins service the Church calls out to them: "You who are in the deserts and caves, assemble and come to greet with songs the Lord of glory who comes riding on a donkey." (Ode 4) At solemn Vespers on the Eve of Palm Sunday, all the monks who had assembled began singing with joy, "Today the grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us together, and we, having taken up Your Cross, exclaim, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, hosanna in the highest.'"

The leading character in the church services of this week is the righteous Lazarus. The Monday service calls this week

the vestibule to Lazarus Saturday: "The vestibule to the resurrection of Lazarus is opened," says the eighth Ode of the canon of Matins, "for Christ is coming to wake the dead Lazarus from sleep and to conquer death with life." In the eighth Ode of the canon of Tuesday's Matins we sing: "Rejoice, O Bethany, home of Lazarus, for Christ having come to you, accomplished the glorious resurrection of Lazarus."

In the services of this week the Church frequently calls upon the faithful to prepare themselves worthily with good deeds to meet Christ: "Bearing the branches of good deeds and the palm branches of chastity, let us all prepare ourselves to meet Christ who is approaching Jerusalem as our God." (Ode 9 of the canon of Monday Matins) "Uniting love with mercy, let us, the faithful hasten to offer our good works up to Christ as a prayer, asking that He raise us also from the grave of our secret passions." (Ode 4 of the canon of Thursday's Matins)

### **The Celebration of the Saturday of Lazarus**

The celebration of the event of the resurrection of Lazarus on the Saturday before Palm Sunday, dates back to the first centuries of Christianity. In the fourth century in the East, the Saturday of Lazarus was already a universal and solemn feastday. The pilgrim Silvia Egeria who lived in the fourth century, gives a detailed description of the celebration of Lazarus Saturday at that time in Jerusalem. In the Diary of her pilgrimage we read that on this day following the morning Divine Liturgy there was a procession to the home of Lazarus in Bethany, approximately two miles from Jerusalem. The bishop of Bethany, priests, monks and the faithful took part in the procession. On the way, not far from Bethany, the procession stopped for a visit to the church which stands on the very spot where Mary, the sister of Lazarus, met the Lord and told Him of the death of her brother. In this church, the Gospel which refers to this meeting of Mary with Christ was read. Afterwards the procession continued to the tomb of Lazarus, chanting hymns and psalms along the way. Such a multitude had already gathered there that they filled not only the place itself but also overflowed into the surrounding fields. At the grave of Lazarus a service was held which included the reading of the Gospel relating to the resurrection of Lazarus.

During the seventh and eighth centuries, the Church hymnographers, St. Andrew of Crete, St. Cosmas of Maiuma, and St. John of Damascus composed sticheras and canons for the service of Lazarus Saturday. This service bears the character of a feast of our Lord, as is evident from the hymns sung at Matins service of Sunday, "The Choir of Angels": "Now that we have seen the Resurrection of Christ;" and "Holy is the Lord our God". On this day instead of the Trisagion Hymn "All who have been baptized into Christ" is sung at the Liturgy, recalling that at one time, on the Saturday of Lazarus, the catechumens were baptized.

A venerable tradition of the Church relates that Lazarus, after his resurrection, left Bethany because the Jewish leaders sought to kill him. He then sailed to the island of Cyprus, where he became a bishop, and lived for thirty years after his resurrection, before he died.

The Prologue, that is, the book containing biographies of the Saints of the Eastern Church, gives October 17 as the date of the translation of the relics of Lazarus. The Prologue relates that the Byzantine emperor, Leo the Philosopher (886-912), built a church in Constantinople in honor of Lazarus. The relics of Lazarus were discovered by emperor Leo on the island of Cyprus where they were enshrined in a marble casket bearing the inscription: "The Four-day Lazarus, Friend of Christ." The emperor Leo ordered these relics to be transferred to a silver casket and placed in the Church of Lazarus in the capital city of Constantinople.

The Latin Church commemorates the feast of Lazarus on Friday of the fourth week of the Great Fast and again on the 17th of December.

### **The Meaning of the Miracle of the Resurrection of Lazarus**

Jesus Christ wrought many miracles during His lifetime but none was so rich in its effects as the resurrection of Lazarus.

For many, this miracle was convincing proof of Christ's divinity. One of the Fathers of the Church said: "Our Saviour snatched the daughter of Jairus from the hands of death, the youth of Naim from the jaws of death, but Lazarus He snatched from the very bowels of death." This miracle marks the

apex of Christ's self-revelation. Here Christ reveals himself as the Lord of life and death, the Conqueror of death, and as the Almighty God Himself. The renowned church writer and ascetic, Father Maurice Meschler, S.J., reflecting on the greatness of this miracle and the impact it had on the Jews, says: "The one who worked this miracle was not Jesus of Nazareth, not the mighty teacher of the law, not one of the prophets of old, nor a spirit from another world, it was the living God Himself. One word from Him rings through the abysses of eternity and brings the soul back from the ends of the world beyond; a flash of lightning pierces the darkness of the grave, and rekindles in the dead bones the spark of life." (Life of Jesus Christ, Vol. II, pp. 103-104) This miracle is the symbol of the glorious resurrection of Christ and at the same time, the prefigurement of the resurrection of all people.

The magnitude of this miracle and the publicity attending it were the immediate causes of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The people, in their enthusiasm for Christ, greeted Him not only as their prophet, but also as their Messias, their King and Lord.

Finally, the resurrection of Lazarus hastened the passion and death of our Saviour. Great crowds of people came to believe in Christ and to follow Him; this disturbed the leaders of the Jews, who immediately after Christ's entry into Jerusalem, called a meeting: "The chief priests and the Pharisees therefore gathered together a council, and said: 'What are we going to do? For this man is working many signs. If we let him alone as he is, all will believe in him'...So from that day forth their plan was to put him to death." (Jo. 11,47-48 and 53 and 12,10)

May this great and wonderful miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus strengthen also our faith in the divinity of Christ and in our own personal resurrection. That same Christ, who raised the four-day Lazarus from the dead, in His own time will raise us also to a life of eternal happiness. He Himself assured us of this when He said: "I am the Resurrection and Life. Whoever believes in me, even though he die, shall live!" (Jo. 11,25)

## Palm Sunday

*“...Like the children, we, too, bear symbols of victory, and cry out to You, the Conqueror of death: ‘Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”*  
(Troparion of Palm Sunday)

Our Lord Jesus Christ climaxed His mission on earth with two memorable events — the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead and His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. These two events, witnessed by great crowds of people, gave a clear and convincing testimony concerning the messianic mission of Christ and His divinity. These two illustrious events also raised the curtain on the last act of the drama of Christ’s life: His passion and death.

Since the first centuries of Christianity the Eastern Church has been celebrating the memory of the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem on the Sunday before His glorious Resurrection. Palm Sunday from the earliest times has been regarded as a great feast of our Lord and is included in the twelve principal festivals of our Church Year. It, too, has its own particular customs which the other feasts do not have.

For a better understanding of this festival we shall consider its history, the customs associated with it and its spiritual significance.

### History of the Celebration of the Festival

The festival of the triumphal entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem is one of the oldest feastdays in the Eastern Church. Testimony regarding its celebration reaches back to the third century. From that time, we have a sermon on Palm Sunday by Bishop Methodius of Patara († ca.300). The celebration of this festival began in Jerusalem, and within a short

period of time became a feastday for the entire Eastern Church.

Silvia of Aquitaine, writing in her Diary about her pilgrimage to the Holy Land, gives us a beautiful description of how this festival was celebrated in Jerusalem in the fourth century. The faithful of Jerusalem endeavoured each year to relive Christ's entry into Jerusalem just as it originally occurred. On Palm Sunday, after the early morning services held in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the faithful assembled at one o'clock in the afternoon at the Church of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives. The bishop with his deacons also assembled here. During the time the people were gathering, various hymns and psalms were sung and the Gospel relating to the entry of Jesus Christ into the city of Jerusalem was read. When all the people had already assembled, a magnificent procession, the young and old, bearing palm or olive branches in their hands, chanted hymns and psalms, always with the refrain: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." The author of the Diary observes that all the children, including those who, being still too young to walk and are carried on their parents' shoulders, carry in their hands palm or olive branches. The bishop and his attendants followed at the end of the procession. Like Christ, the bishop rode on a donkey. The procession proceeded through the city to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre where the solemn celebration concluded with the service of Vespers.

Many ancient documents testify to the commemoration of Christ's entry into Jerusalem on the Sunday before the Pasch (Easter). We shall mention only a few of these here. St. Epiphanius of Cyprus (†403) composed two sermons still extant on the feast of Palm Sunday. St. Ephrem the Syrian (†373) dedicated a special hymn to the feast. Cyril of Alexandria (†386) and the Patriarch of Constantinople Proclus (†446) mention this feast. Anastasius the Sinaite (7c), a monk of the Sinai monastery and a theologian of the Eastern Church was the first to note that the Forty Days Fast terminated with the feast of Palm Sunday.

Beginning with the seventh century, various Church writers, such as Andrew of Crete, Cosmas of Maiuma, John of Damascus, Theodore and Joseph the Studite, composed sticheras and canons for this feast. Palm Sunday, although it ranks among the principal feasts of our Lord, has neither a



*Holy Friday Church, Chernihiv, Ukraine (12th-13th c.)*

pre-feast nor a post-feast because it occurs during the period of fast.

Sometime between the sixth and the seventh centuries this feast spread to the Western Church under the title of Palm Sunday. In the West, also, the practice of holding a procession with palm branches on this day took root. The blessed palms are kept until the following year when they are burned and the ashes are used to sprinkle the heads of the faithful on Ash Wednesday as a sign of penance.

### **The Customs of Palm Sunday**

In our liturgical books this day is called, "Sunday of the Palms", "Flower or Blossom Sunday", Flower- or Blossom-bearing Sunday", Sunday of "Flower- or Blossom-bearing". Our people call this Sunday the "Sunday of Pussy-willows" or "Pussy-willow" Sunday, "Willow Sunday", "Sunday of the Willow". All these names are associated with the custom of blessing and distributing palm or olive branches on that day in church. Because no palm or olive trees grow in our country, we have a venerable custom of using willow branches, a tree that is the first to blossom in the spring.

Among the Jews and ancient Romans, the palm branch was the symbol of victory. For this reason it was held in the hand during a triumphal or victory procession. Also, at the public games the victors were presented with the palm branch as a sign of victory. In the New Testament the palm branch became the symbol of martyrdom. In the catacombs, palm branches were laid on the tomb of a martyr as the symbol of the victory of the martyr. The olive branch is the symbol of peace. In our Trebnyk (Euchologion), in the prayer for blessing of palms, the willow branch is also called the symbol of the resurrection.

In Greek, palm branches are called "baia"; and in the Church-Slavonic transcription "Vayia"; hence, the name "Nedilya Vayij" (Sunday of Palms).

It is difficult to say with certainty when the custom of blessing branches of the palm, olive or other trees in church arose. The blessing of branches seems to have already been in practice, in some places, in the seventh century, although the actual ceremony of blessing does not appear in liturgical documents until the ninth century.



The blessing and distribution of palms, according to the prescription of our rite, takes place on Palm Sunday during the Matins service after the Gospel at Psalm 50. In Eastern Ukraine a custom also existed of blessing and distributing willow branches in the cities on Saturday evening, while in the villages, these were blessed and distributed on the morning of Palm Sunday. Along with a willow branch the faithful also received a small candle, as a symbol of the resurrection.

Among our people, various practices existed, even some superstitious ones, that were associated with the blessed willow branch. The blessed willow branch was never destroyed by our people. Instead, they placed it in the house behind an icon, or planted it in the garden. With it they blessed the cattle, when they were being led for the first time into pasture. The farmer carried the blessed willow branch around his farm, praying that it might be protected from impure spirits. Some even swallowed the bud of the willow so that "the throat would not hurt." In some places, a blessed willow branch was placed in the hands of the deceased, so that at the general resurrection they would meet Christ carrying the emblem of victory. As they were going out of the church on Palm Sunday, the faithful would lightly strike one another on the shoulder with the willow branch, saying: "It is not I who strike you, but it is the willow branch, within a week we shall celebrate Easter." Thus did they remind one another that Easter was drawing near.

Following the example of the Church in Jerusalem, a custom of holding a procession with palms on Palm Sunday also arose in Greece in the ninth-tenth centuries, during which the patriarch of Constantinople rode through the streets on a donkey.

### **The Spiritual Meaning of Palm Sunday**

The Jews wanted to see their messiah in power and glory. Accordingly, Jesus Christ, by raising Lazarus from the dead and by His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, gave them clear proof of His power and glory. He demonstrated, publicly, that He is not only the Lord of living and dead nature, but also Lord of hearts of men. Such a triumphal procession Jerusalem had not witnessed for a long time.

St. Matthew the Evangelist confirmed this: "And when

He entered Jerusalem, all the city was thrown into commotion, saying: 'Who is this?' But the crowds kept on saying: 'This is Jesus the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.'" (Matthew 21,10-11)

The honor given to Christ lasted for only a brief moment, for His betrayal by Judas, His rejection by the people, His condemnation by the Jewish leaders, His passion, the way of the cross and crucifixion followed in quick succession. These very same people who, on Sunday cried out, "Hosanna", within a few days would be crying out: "Crucify Him."

Palm Sunday teaches us the instability of worldly glory and the vanity of earthly happiness. Joy and sadness here on earth are two inseparable sisters. Therefore, if we wish one day to have a share in the triumph of Christ in heaven, we must first undergo a Passion week and a Golgotha with Him here on earth. Only then, will we be able, like Him, to enter into everlasting triumph, joy and resurrection.



## The Holy Shroud (Plaschanytsia)

*“Noble Joseph took down Your most pure  
body from the tree, wrapped it in a clean  
shroud, covered it with spices and laid  
it in a new tomb.”*

*(Troparion of Holy or Great Friday)*

The service of Great or Holy Friday is characterized by its very beautiful ceremonies, stirring hymns and melodies and sticheras of profound significance. Their main theme is the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the fifteenth antiphon of the Matins service of Great Friday we sing: “Today He hangs on the cross, Who hung the earth upon waters. The King of the angels has a crown of thorns placed upon Him. He was clothed in mock purple. The One Who in the Jordan freed Adam, received a slap. The Bridegroom of the church was riveted (to the cross) with nails. The Son of the Virgin was pierced with a lance. Christ, we worship Your passion. Christ, we worship Your passion. Christ, we worship Your passion. Make known to us Your glorious Resurrection as well.”

The central focus of the sublime and moving rites of the Great Friday services is the Holy Shroud (Plaschanytsia). This holy icon of Christ in the tomb became an integral part of the rites of the Vesper services of Great Friday and the Matins service of Great Saturday. During these services we pay special public honor and veneration to the Holy Shroud. The reason for this is that the history of the salvation of mankind is inscribed on the icon of the Holy Shroud in blood-red letters. The Holy Shroud speaks to us of the severe justices of God and His everlasting love and unfathomable mercy toward us sinners.

Because of the liturgical significance of the Holy Shroud,

it is fitting that we say a little more about its history and the rite of placing or exposing it for public veneration.

### **History of the Holy Shroud**

The Holy Shroud, as it is used today in the Great Friday and Saturday services, is of comparatively recent date, for it is scarcely several hundreds of years old. Its origin dates back, however, to the time of Christ's death. The Holy Shroud is nothing but the winding sheet in which Christ's dead body was wrapped when it was laid in the tomb. The Holy Shroud, as it is used in the services of Great Friday and Saturday, was unknown to the Eastern Church for about fifteen hundred years.

The Christians of the Church of Jerusalem in the first centuries on Great Friday, venerated the wood of the cross which was discovered at the beginning of the fourth century by St. Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine. This rite of the veneration of the cross was recorded by the pilgrim Silvia of Acquitaine (4c). In her *Diary of a Pilgrimage*, we read that on Great Friday the bishop, attended by deacons, processed to Golgotha where he sat on a throne set up for him on the very spot where Christ was crucified. While the deacons stood around him, a table covered with a linen cloth was placed before him, and on this table was laid the sacred wood of the cross and its inscription. The bishop held the ends of the sacred wood with his hands while the faithful came forth, one by one, approached the table, made a profound bow to the ground, touched the cross and the inscription with their foreheads and eyes, then kissed the cross and departed.

The custom of venerating the Holy Cross on Great Friday later spread to the Greek Church. During the Matins service after the fifth Gospel of the Passion, while the above stichera, "Today He hangs on the Cross..." was being sung, the priest or the bishop took the processional cross from behind the altar and carried it out of the sanctuary and placed it in the middle of the church. As the following words of the stichera were being sung: "We worship Your passion, O Christ...", the priest and all the faithful made three bows to the ground and then kissed the Holy Cross.

Under the influence of the Eastern Church the veneration of the Holy Cross on Great Friday in the middle of the seventh

century reached to the Western Church where it is still practised at the present day.



During the Divine Liturgy the Eastern Church covers the holy gifts on the proskomedia with a large rectangular veil. This veil, which is also called the "aer", began to be used in the Liturgy by the Church of Jerusalem during the time of St. Sabbas the Sanctified (†532), author of the Jerusalem Typicon. St. Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople (713-730), teaches that the "aer" is the symbol of that stone with which Joseph of Arimathea sealed the tomb of Christ. According to Simeon of Thessalonica (†1429) however, the "aer" is interpreted as the symbol of the naked and dead body of Jesus, which was laid in the tomb. For this reason, he says, the picture of Christ as He is being laid in the tomb, is sometimes depicted on the "aer". At the Great Entrance the deacon carries this "aer" before the holy gifts. The priest then takes it and covers the chalice and the bread on the altar with it, while reciting silently the troparion: "The noble Joseph..."

This Greek custom of having the veil on the icon of Christ in the tomb came to us in the fourteenth century along with the Jerusalem Typicon. This was the beginning of our Holy Shroud (Plaschanytsia).

According to the prescriptions of the Jerusalem Typicon the troparion, "The noble Joseph...", is sung also in the Vespers service of Great Friday and in the Matins service of Great Saturday. Our devout ancestors, it seems, when singing this requiem hymn in honor of the Saviour, not only wished to relive this event in spirit, but also wished to see with their own eyes the icon representing His being laid in the tomb. For this reason the veil, our first Shroud, because of its symbolic meaning, came after this troparion, at first in the Matins services of Great Saturday, then afterwards in the Vespers service of Great Friday.

In the sixteenth century there appears among our people the custom of carrying the "aer"-shroud with the icon of the dead Christ during the entrance with the Holy Gospel at the Great Doxology in the Matins service of Great Saturday. The entrance ends with the singing of the troparion "The noble Joseph...", and the veneration by bowing down and kissing the aer-shroud. After Matins it is again placed on the altar, together with the Gospel Book. During this century, the veil with the icon of Christ in the tomb was first called by our people the "plaschanytsia" or shroud.

The rite of venerating the Holy Shroud was, after some

time, transferred from the Matins service of Great Saturday to the Vespers service of Great Friday. This happened, probably because the troparion "The noble Joseph..." was sung in the services of Passion Week for the first time in the Vespers service of Great Friday.

In addition to the figure of Christ in the tomb we now have the figures of Mary the Mother of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea and the pious women who took part in the burial of Jesus Christ depicted on the Holy Shroud. Along the border of the shroud are inscribed the words of the troparion "The noble Joseph, etc."

### **The Rite of Placing or Laying Out of the Holy Shroud**

Our handwritten Typicons up to the sixteenth century make no mention of the rite of placing or laying out the Holy Shroud, for it had just begun to come into practice at that time. Since the Holy Shroud became part of the Vespers service of Great Friday and Matins service of Great Saturday, not by virtue of a special prescription, but by way of a custom of the Church, there is no one uniform rite of placing the shroud to this day. In this regard various local Churches developed their own customs. The veneration of the Holy Shroud in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries became a general universal practice and custom of the entire Eastern Church.

The rite of carrying out and the placing of the shroud according to the Typicon of Father Isidore Dolnytsky was performed at the cathedral churches in Galicia in the following manner:

"During the Vespers service of Great Friday, while the following stichera of the Aposticha was being sung, 'You who clothe yourself with light as with a garment...' a procession was made around the church with the shroud, which was carried by four priests or elders of the church, each holding one of the four corners. After the procession, the shroud was placed upon a specially prepared table in the middle of the church. At the end of the Vespers service while the troparion "The noble Joseph..." is being sung three times, all approached the Holy Shroud on their knees and devoutly kissed it. The Lord's grave was adorned with flowers and burning candles, and behind the grave stood a plain cross without the corpus

(the crucified body of Christ) with a cloth hanging over its crossbeams.”

Father I. Dolnysky recalls also that in Galicia there was a custom during the procession with the Holy Shroud to carry the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, which afterwards was placed either on the top of the grave of the Lord or on the altar for adoration. He remarked that this custom had been taken over from the Latin Church. The custom of exposing the Blessed Sacrament in conjunction with the Shroud is completely contrary to the spirit of Great Friday and the spirit of the Eastern Church. The Holy Shroud, as a matter of fact, is actually the symbol of Christ in the tomb; therefore, there is no reason here for the public veneration of the Blessed Sacrament. On Great Friday in some localities in the Western Church, the Blessed Sacrament is removed from the tabernacle and the tabernacle doors are opened to indicate that Christ is not present there, but in the tomb.

The Typicon of Dr. Alexander Mykyta says that in Carpatho-Ukraine, during the procession with the shroud, the priest carries the shroud on his back holding one end of the Shroud on his head, while the other end is held by two people. The procession is made only once.

In Eastern Ukraine and Russia during the Vespers while the troparion “The noble Joseph” is being sung, the Holy Shroud is carried out only to the middle of the church; whereas the procession with the Holy Shroud takes place at the Great Doxology in the Matins service of Great Saturday. During the procession the priest carries the shroud upon his head and under the shroud he also holds the Gospel Book which he later places on the Holy Shroud at the Lord’s grave.

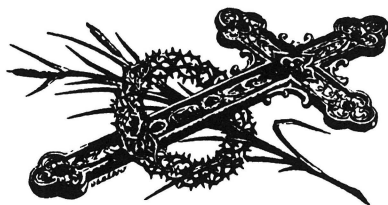
The Holy Shroud remains exposed for veneration until the Matins of the Resurrection. Before Matins, following a short service performed at the grave, it is carried into the sanctuary and placed on the altar. There is no special prescription as to where the Holy Shroud should be placed during the Easter season. Some churches keep it on the altar until St. Thomas Sunday, then hang it up on the wall behind the altar above the cathedra (or throne), while in other churches the shroud remains on the altar until the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women. In our churches the shroud remains on the altar until the Feast of Ascension, i.e. forty days, as a sign of Christ’s sojourn of forty days on earth.



Among our people the Holy Shroud is truly venerated and loved. Many of our faithful observe a strict fast on Great Friday and approach the Holy Shroud fasting, just as they would approach to receive Holy Communion. They approach the Holy Shroud in no other way than on the knees, starting frequently as far back as the doors of the church. By the grave of our Lord, sometimes through the whole night from Great Friday to Saturday, an honor guard usually stands provided by our youth and adult organizations. The veneration and the kissing of the Holy Shroud is, for our faithful, a truly profound spiritual experience and an opportunity to renew their faith and love for Christ, who out of love for us, died on the Cross.

### **The Funeral Stichera Sung During the Rite of Placing the Shroud**

“You, who clothe Yourself with light as with a garment, were taken down from the cross by Joseph and Nicodemus. And seeing You dead, naked and unburied, he raised a heart-rending lament and said: ‘Alas, dearest Jesus! A short while ago the sun saw You hanging on the cross and covered itself with darkness. The earth trembled in fear, and the veil of the temple was torn asunder. But now I see You who, willingly, underwent death for my sake. How can I bury You, my God? In what kind of shroud can I wrap You? With what kind of hands can I touch Your incorruptible Body? What song shall I sing at Your departure, merciful Lord? I extol Your Passion, and with hymns I praise Your burial together with Your Resurrection, crying out: ‘O Lord, glory be to You!’”



# **Easter Confession and Holy Communion**

*“O Son of God, accept me today as a partaker of Your mystical Supper...”  
(Prayer before Holy Communion)*

We prepare ourselves for the glorious feast of Christ's Resurrection with the holy Great Fast and conclude our spiritual preparation with the paschal or Easter Confession and Holy Communion. Confession and Holy Communion are singularly important sacraments in the life of the Church and of the faithful, for they are the pulse of their spiritual life and holiness. Pertaining to these two sacraments, both the Eastern and Western Churches have their own particular laws and customs. The practice of receiving these two sacraments has varied in the different periods of the Church. Here we shall give a brief history of the practice of the Christians of the first centuries and of our Church from the times when Christianity was introduced in the Rus-Ukraine to the present day.

## **The Practice of the First Centuries**

Christians of the first centuries lived a deep spiritual life. This life was above all manifested in the deep appreciation and respect they manifested for the Divine Liturgy and for frequent, even daily, reception of Holy Communion. For them to assist at the Divine Liturgy meant to unite each time in Holy Communion with the Eucharistic Christ. Therefore all the faithful received Holy Communion at every Divine Liturgy. In reference to this St. Basil the Great (†379) wrote in a letter to the Caesarius Patricius: “Now, to receive Holy Communion daily, thus to partake of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ, is an excellent and advantageous practice... We, ourselves, in Caesarea, of course, receive Holy Communion four times a



week, on Sunday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday; also on other days, if there is a commemoration of some saint. In Alexandria and in Egypt, each Christian, even those belonging to the laity, has Holy Communion in his own home, and when he wishes, he receives with his own hands..." (Letter 93).

Not only did adults strengthen themselves at the Divine Liturgy with Holy Communion, but they also administered this sacrament to small children from the day of their baptism. This practice has been preserved to the present day in almost all the Eastern Churches, even though the Western Church abandoned it in the thirteenth century. In the Ukrainian Catholic Church this practice still continued to the time of the Synod of Zamost (1720), which directed that small children be given Holy Communion, when they had reached the age of reason.

The practice of daily and frequent Communion lasted until the fifth century in the Church. At this time, this beautiful custom began slowly to decline. Under the influence of the teachings of the holy Fathers of the Church the faithful began more and more to acquire a better understanding and respect toward the Holy Eucharist. But this, in turn, awakened, within them, a sense of fear and unworthiness. Under the pretext of unworthiness some limited the practice of receiving Holy Communion to Easter time or to a few days in the year.

St. John Chrysostom (†407) rebuked those who attended the Divine Liturgy, but did not receive Holy Communion: "In vain is the daily Sacrifice being offered up," he says, "in vain do we stand at the altar, since no one comes to receive Holy Communion... How can one be present at the Divine Liturgy and not receive the Holy Sacrament?" (Homily 3, On the Letter to the Ephesians). To those who tried to justify themselves by their unworthiness he says, not without irony, that if they are so unworthy then they should not even receive the Holy Sacrament once a year.

In the beginning, those who did not wish to receive Holy Communion did not attend the Divine Liturgy at all. Consequently, the various synods in the East and in the West began imposing ecclesiastical penalties upon those, who were not present for several weeks at the Unbloody Sacrifice on Sunday. From this rose a new custom: one could be present at the Divine Liturgy and not be obliged to receive Holy Communion. Mindful of this, the Church set out to lay down norms governing the participation of the faithful in Holy Communion. The ninth canon of the Holy Apostles directs: "All those faithful who enter and listen to the Scriptures, but do not stay for prayer and Holy Communion must be excommunicated on the ground that they are causing the Church a breach of order." The same canon was repeated by the local Synod of Antioch (341) which added that "such persons are to be excommunicated from the Church and remain so until they go to confession, produce fruits of penance and ask pardon; only then will they be able to obtain forgiveness." (Rule 2)

The local Synod in Agde (506), France, decreed that those who do not receive Holy Communion on the Nativity of our Lord, Easter (the Pasch) and Pentecost shall cease to be members of the Church. The final legislation regarding Confession and Holy Communion in the Western Church was formulated by the Lateran Council (1215), which bound all the faithful in conscience, at least once a year, to confess their sins and to receive Holy Communion.

After the practice of frequent Holy Communion had been abandoned, the Great Fast became, for all the faithful not only a time of preparation for the feast of the Pasch, but also an opportunity for the annual paschal (Easter) Confession and Holy Communion which they received on Holy Thursday, —

the day of the institution of the Holy Eucharist, — or on the same day of the Resurrection (Easter).

From the time that, not all the faithful but only some, or even no one at all, received Holy Communion at the Divine Liturgy, the Eastern Church introduced the custom of distributing the “antidoron” at the end of the Divine Liturgy to all those faithful who did not participate in Holy Communion. “Antidoron” is a Greek word which means “instead of the gift”, that is, in place of the Holy Gifts. It was the remains (left overs) of the prophora or bread from which the Lamb or Host was cut out at the table of Prothesis.

### **The First Centuries of Christianity in Ukraine**

When our ancestors accepted the holy faith from Byzantium they also accepted the prescriptions of the Greek Church concerning Confession and Holy Communion. The Metropolitan of Kiev, George (1072), gives us these prescriptions in his “Rules”, “Whoever is worthy,” he says in the ninth rule, “let him receive the Holy Sacraments on all the Sundays of the Great Fast, Great Thursday, Great Saturday, Easter, Ascension of our Lord, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, during Peter’s Fast, on the feast of St. Peter, the feast of the holy Martyrs Borys and Hlib, the feasts of the Transfiguration, Dormition of the most Holy Mother of God, St. Nicholas, the Nativity of our Lord, the Theophany and the Presentation (Meeting or Encounter) of our Lord.” (E. Golubinsky: History of the Russian Church, Vol. I, Part Two, p. 534)

It appears from this that almost 150 years before the time the Lateran Council prescribed for the Western Church that the faithful must receive Holy Communion under penalty of mortal sin at least once a year, in our land prescriptions encouraging the faithful to receive Holy Communion more frequently had already existed. In fact, as we have seen above, it was received by our people over twenty times a year.

### **The Practice in the More Recent Times**

Regarding Confession and Holy Communion the prescriptions of the Kievan Metropolitan, Peter Mohyla (†1647), merit special attention. In his Euchologion, published in 1646, he directs all pastors to remind their people as early as

Cheesefare week and the first week of lent of their obligation to confess their sins twice during the Great Fast — at the beginning and at the end of the Great Fast — as well as to receive Holy Communion. During the other three fasts he directs the faithful to go to Confession and receive Holy Communion at least once. He taught that the Church instituted four fasts in the year, during which every Christian should confess his sins and receive Holy Communion.

Should one be so neglectful as not to confess his sins and receive Holy Communion even once a year during the Great Fast, Metropolitan Peter Mohyla directs the pastors to reprimand him publicly three times, namely, on Palm Sunday, Great Thursday and Great Saturday. Should he fail to fulfill his Christian obligation, then he is to be excommunicated from the Church publicly on Bright or Easter Tuesday until he repents. Should he die in the state of impenitence, then he is to be refused Christian burial. He recommends to those who rarely go to confession and lapse into sin repeatedly, that they confess and receive Holy Communion every month and on certain great feastdays.

The Eastern Church prescribes before every confession a so-called “hoviniye”; this is a special preparation that lasts seven days, or three days or at least one day. During this period of preparation the faithful must, as far as possible, be present in church every day at the divine services, observe a strict fast, pray more at home, perform works of mercy, reflect upon their sins and during this time seek reconciliation with all.

The Synod of Zamost (1720) enjoins the priests to exhort the faithful to confess their sins at least three times a year and receive the Sacraments on these days: Easter (Resurrection Day) — on this day under penalty of excommunication —, on the Dormition of the most Holy Mother of God, and on the Nativity of our Lord. Lest the “hoviniye” (that special preparation before confession) prevent one from going to confession, the Synod explains that, although fasting is praiseworthy, nevertheless, it is not an integral part of confession.

The Synod of Lviv (1891) also recommended frequent Confession and Holy Communion and the observance of our traditional custom of receiving the Sacraments at least three times a year. The Synod ordered those who are negligent in



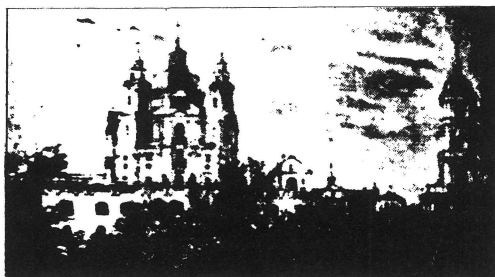
*Christ the vine grower (17th C).*

this matter to be reprimanded and reminded of the penalty of excommunication from the Church.

For daily and frequent Holy Communion the Church does not demand confession each time one goes to Holy Communion. One may receive Holy Communion frequently as long as one is not guilty of mortal sin. Venial sins do not constitute an obstacle to Holy Communion. Actually one may receive Holy Communion daily while it suffices that he confess his sins once a month.

The most Holy Eucharist is the holiest and most sacred Sacrament because in this Sacrament, under the appearance of bread and wine, the true and living Jesus Christ, our Saviour, Lord and God is present. The Second Vatican Council declares that "in the Liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, as from a font, grace is poured forth upon us; and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed, as toward their end are most powerfully achieved..." (Constitution on the Liturgy, §10). For this reason the Council directs that we join our participation in the Divine Liturgy with Holy Communion: "The perfect form of participation in the Divine Liturgy, whereby the faithful, after the priest's Communion, receive the Lord's Body from the same sacrifice, is strongly commended." (§55)

Therefore, let these two great and holy Sacraments serve us as a perpetual fountain of love of God and of neighbor, of our faith and holiness and as our guarantee of everlasting happiness according to the words of Christ: "Whoever eats my body and drinks my blood, shall have eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day." (John 6,54)



*Pochaiv Monastery*



## The Glorious Feast of the Resurrection

*"Christ is risen from the dead, by death  
He conquered death; and to those in the  
graves He granted life."*

*(Troparion of the Resurrection)*

Of all the great feasts in the Ecclesiastical Year the most ancient, celebrated and joyous is the resplendent feast of the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. This festival, according to the Irmos of the eighth Ode of the Paschal canon of the Matins of the Resurrection is: "The King and Lord, the Feast of feasts, and Triumph of triumphs."

The holy Fathers of the Church, in a special way, stress the significance and the majesty of this feast. "The Pasch (Resurrection) for us," says St. Gregory the Theologian in his Easter sermon, "is the feast of feasts, which surpasses all the other, not only civil, but also Christian feasts, celebrated in honor of our Lord, as the sun surpasses the stars." St. John Chrysostom in his sermon on the Resurrection extols this feast in these words: "Where, O Death, is your sting? Where, O Hades, is your victory? Christ is risen and you have fallen. Christ is risen and the demons have been cast down. Christ is risen and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen and life reigns. Christ is risen and the tomb is emptied of the dead, for Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep."

Thus, during the glorious and joyous day of the Resurrection (Easter) the Church calls upon heaven and earth to unite in holy and divine rejoicing: "Let, therefore, the heavens worthily rejoice, and the earth be glad, the whole creation visible and invisible celebrate, for Christ is risen, Eternal Joy. (Troparion of the first Ode in the Matins service of the Resurrection)

To acquire a better understanding of the majesty and spirit of the feast of the Resurrection, we shall consider its history, liturgical services, and significance for us.

## **History of the Feast of the Resurrection**

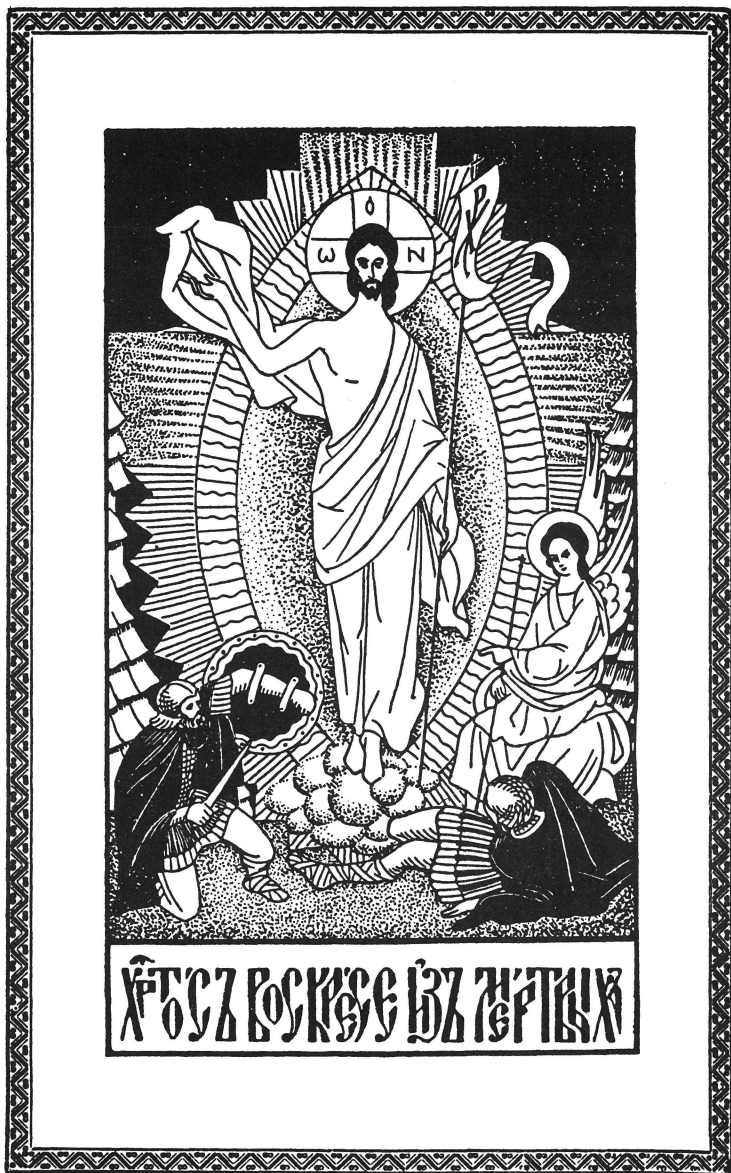
The feast of the Resurrection of our Lord in our liturgical texts (books) is addressed with the following titles: "The Holy and Great Sunday of the Pasch", "The Day of the Holy Pasch" or simply "The Holy Pasch". Our people have still another name for the Resurrection (Easter), and that is, "Greatday" or "The Great Day", since it is truly great for the event it commemorates and for its significance and for the great joy it brings.

The word "pasch" is derived from the Hebrew word "pasach" which denotes "passover". Here it refers to the angel of God who, because Pharaoh would not free the Israelites, during the night destroyed the first-born of the Egyptians, but "passed over" (in Hebrew "pasach") the houses of the Israelites, whose door frames were sprinkled with the blood of a one year old lamb. To the Jews the word "pasch" also meant a lamb, which they slaughtered on the feast of the Pasch (Passover). Later this name came to denote the day or feast of the Pasch itself, which commemorated the deliverance of the Jews from Egyptian bondage.

For the Apostles and first Christians the Pasch became the symbol of another passover, namely, the twofold or double passover of Jesus Christ: first from life to death and then from death to life. The first passover formed the basis for the Pasch of the Crucifixion, and the second for the joyful Pasch of the Resurrection. The Apostles and first Christians celebrated the Christian Pasch together with the Jews, but it was not one of joy; rather it was one that was sad and linked with fasting, because it was, for them, the anniversary of Christ's death.

For the Christians, the paschal lamb of the Jews prefigured Jesus Christ who, like an innocent lamb, offered himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. This is why in the resurrectional services he is called "the paschal lamb" or simply the "Pasch". "For Christ our passover," says St. Paul, "has been sacrificed." (I Cor. 5,7)

In the second century while the sorrowful Pasch of the Crucifixion was still being observed, the practice of



celebrating the joyous Pasch in honor of Christ's Resurrection arose. This Pasch was kept on the Sunday after the Jewish Pasch (Passover). Regarding this twofold celebration of the Pasch of the Crucifixion and the Pasch of the Resurrection, a long and relentless controversy developed concerning the day

on which the Pasch should be celebrated. This dispute arose because of the changing view concerning the character of the Pasch itself. At first, Christians had looked upon the Pasch as a day of sorrow and fasting in memory of Christ's death but, gradually, they developed a desire to combine this sadness with the joyful celebration of Christ's glorious Resurrection. This joyous festival did not, of course, harmonize with an attitude of sorrow nor with penitential fasting. The Christian Church, as a whole, began celebrating the Pasch of Christ's Resurrection on Sunday; but certain Christian communities, especially in Asia Minor, stubbornly adhered to the celebration of the Pasch with the Jews on the 14th day of Nisan, which is the day of the first vernal full moon. These Christian groups were called "Quartodecimani", (from the Latin word for the fourteenth) i.e., the "Fourteenth-dayers", from the day of the 14th of Nisan.

The Council of Nicea (325) finally put an end to these long and bitter disputes by decreeing that all Christians must celebrate the feast of the Pasch on the same day, that is, on the Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox of March 21, and not according to the Jewish custom.

During the course of the fourth and fifth centuries, the celebration of the Pasch was extended from one day to a whole week, called "Bright Week", in contrast to the week before Easter, which was called "Great" or "Passion" week.

The collection of ecclesiastical laws entitled the "Apostolic Constitutions", which were set down in writing in Syria around 380 A.D. but which allegedly, from Apostolic times, offers the following information concerning "Bright Week": "Let slaves rest from their work all the Great Week, and that which follows it — for the one in memory of the passion, and the other of the resurrection; and there is need they should be instructed who it is that suffered and rose again, and who it is that permitted him to suffer, and raised him again." (VIII, 33)

Emperor Theodosius the Great (†395) banned court proceedings during the entire Bright Week, while Emperor Theodosius the Younger (†450) barred all performances in the theatre and circus. In Jerusalem, the most solemn days were the first three days of the Pasch, which the Eastern Church observes to the present day.

Regarding the method of celebrating Bright Week, the

Sixth Ecumenical Council (691) decreed: "From the holy day of the Resurrection of Christ our God to the new Sunday (i.e., Thomas Sunday) the faithful are required to spend the time in a state of leisure, frequent the church and participate in singing psalms, and spiritual hymns, rejoicing in Christ, and listening attentively to the readings of the Holy Scriptures, for in this way shall we rise with Christ and with Him be glorified. Therefore, during these days no horse races or other public spectacles are allowed to be held." (Rule 66)

### **Matins of the Resurrection**

Of all the services in honor of the feast of the Resurrection of our Lord, the Matins of the Resurrection commands our special attention. This morning service can be called the grand hymn of glory in honor of Christ the Victor. Composed by that great theologian of the Eastern Church and great master of eloquence, St. John Damascene (c. 676-749), it is based on the paschal (Easter) sermons of the Fathers of the Church — Gregory the Theologian, Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom. The content of this resurrectional service is profoundly dogmatic, its form highly poetic, its tone joyful and victorious.

The troparion of the Resurrection: "Christ is risen from the dead...", which is sung so many times during the Easter season, encompasses the content, essence and significance of the feast. The canon is the center of the Resurrection Matins. In the Irmoses, troparions and sticheras of the canon, Christ reveals Himself to us as the promised Messiah, as God in majesty and power, as the Saviour and Redeemer and as the Victor over death, Hades and sin.

In regard to its form, the paschal Matins is poetry at its best and is, frankly speaking, unique in the ecclesiastical literature of the Eastern Church. Here we find a great wealth of beautiful poetic forms, images, comparisons and symbols.

The triumphal tone, characteristic of a holy, unearthly and everlasting joy permeates the profound content and poetic forms of the Matins of the Resurrection. Here we experience that fulness of joy because of the Resurrection of Christ, which St. Gregory the Theologian expresses in his paschal sermon: "Yesterday I was crucified with Christ, today I am glorified with Him. Yesterday I died with Him, today I

live with Him. Yesterday I was buried with Him, today I rise with Him." In Christ's victory all creation shares — heaven, earth and Hades. Everything calls upon us to rejoice. This heavenly joy overwhelms the whole person and all his sentiments.

The joy of the Resurrection reaches its peak in the sticheras of the Resurrection. They form one powerful hymn of joy in honor of the risen Christ — the New Testament Pasch. This joy is imparted to all and embraces all, even our enemies. "This is the day of the Resurrection," we sing in the last stichera, "let us be enlightened in triumphal celebration and embracing one another, let us say: 'Brother' — even to those hating us, let us forgive all things because of the Resurrection, and thus let us sing: 'Christ is risen from the dead, by death He conquered death and to those in the graves He granted life.'"

### **The Significance of the Resurrection**

The resurrection of Christ is incontrovertible proof of his divinity. When the Pharisees and the Scribes demanded a sign from Christ which would prove that He is the Son of God, He answered them saying that they will not receive a sign other than that of the Prophet Jonas: "For even as Jonas was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12,40). And so it happened. On the third day of His death, the glorious Resurrection took place.

The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of our faith. What meaning would Christ's teaching have had if the resurrection, which he had so frequently predicted, had not taken place. The Apostles, when they preached the Gospel, frequently appealed to Christ's resurrection as to the most convincing argument proving the veracity of Christ's doctrine. "If Christ has not risen, then," says St. Paul, "is our preaching vain and vain too is your faith... But, as it is, Christ has risen from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep." (I Cor. 15,14-20) For this reason, the truth of the resurrection and the Christian religion are inseparable.

The resurrection of Christ, finally, is the sure pledge of our own resurrection to a happy everlasting life. Just as Christ rose, so too shall we rise one day to a new and glorious eternal

life. Christ Himself assured us of this when He said: "The hour is coming in which all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God. And they who have done good shall come forth unto resurrection of life; but they who have done evil unto resurrection of judgment... For this is the will of the Father who sent me, that whoever beholds the Son and believes in Him, shall have everlasting life, and I will raise Him up on the last day." (John 5,28-29; 6,40)



*Drawing by Christine Dochwat*

## Ecclesiastical-Liturgical Customs of Easter

*"This is the day which the Lord has made,  
let us be glad and rejoice therein."  
(Prokimen of the Resurrection)*

The feast of the Resurrection of Christ is rich not only in majestic church services, melodies, song and deeply symbolic rites, but also in very beautiful ecclesiastical-liturgical and folk customs. Some of these customs are specifically Christian while others trace their origin to the pre-Christian festival which greeted the arrival of spring and the vernal sun. Christianity sanctified many of these ancient customs by investing them with a Christian meaning and symbolism thereby transforming them into Christian practices.

Professor Stephen Kylymnyk, describing Easter night and speaking of the customs of Easter remarked: "If modern man were able for a moment to look into the pure soul of a child and experience that joy, that boundless joy a child experiences as though it were in the land of make-believe, when it anticipates the morrow of Easter — then he would understand and feel that invisible one thousand-year-old tie, that union of his soul with the souls of the ancient ancestors, — that union of modern Christian culture with the thousand-year-old highly-developed culture of our ancestors... he would then cherish these customs, these traditions of the Ukrainian people as something sacred and sublime; he would guard them, preserve them, cling to them as to a precious treasure to be transmitted from generation to generation. (The Ukrainian Folk Year from the Historical Perspective, Vol. III, p. 82)

Here we would like to point out, first of all, the more important liturgical characteristics of the feast of the Pasch (Easter), as well as some of the national (folk) customs associated with Easter.





*Drawing by Myron Levytsky*

### **Liturgical Characteristics**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ took place very early in the morning on the Sunday — the third day after His death. Hence, there came into existence the ancient custom of ending the paschal fast on Saturday night, beginning the resurrection (Easter) celebrations at midnight, immediately after midnight, or at dawn. Since no uniform practice existed in all the Churches, the Sixth Ecumenical Council (691) established the following rule: “The faithful, celebrating the days of the saving passion, with fasting and prayer and contrition, must cease their fast about the middle hours of the night after Great Saturday, the divine Evangelists Matthew and Luke having first indicated to us the lateness of the night, the one by

adding the words 'after the evening of Saturday' (Matthew 28,1) and the other by saying, 'very early in the morning.'" (Luke 24,1) (Canon 89)

The resurrectional celebrations begin with a procession around the church, accompanied by the ringing of the church bells. This procession is the symbol of the myrrh-bearing women who, early Sunday morning, went to the grave of the Lord.

The Typicon of Father Isidore Dolnytsky notes that the shroud must not be carried in the procession because this practice was banned by Cardinal Sembratovych as incompatible with the joy of the Resurrection. Instead, an icon depicting the Resurrection must be carried in the procession. Other typicons mention that the Holy Gospel, the icon of the Mother of God and other icons may be used. In regard to carrying the Blessed Sacrament in procession, Father I. Dolnytsky says that our typicons do not mention it and that neither the Greeks nor the Latins have this custom, only local Latin churches, specifically, the Polish churches employ this practice. Just as on Great Friday the symbol of Christ is the shroud, so on Easter the symbol of Christ is the icon of the Resurrection, hence, no need exists for the Blessed Sacrament to be exposed.

After the procession, the Matins of the Resurrection begins before the closed doors of the church, as though before the sealed tomb of our Lord. Here for the first time we hear the joyful hymn: "Christ is risen from the dead..." As the hymn is being sung, the priest opens the doors of the church with the cross, as a sign that Christ's death opened the gates of heaven.

Our earliest typicons prescribe at the end of the Matins of the Resurrection, during the singing of the sticheras of the Pasch, that at the words "and let us embrace one another" the faithful kiss one another. The rite of mutual kissing is called "Chrystosuvannya" i.e., "Christing" and, at this time, the faithful greet each other with the words, "Christ is risen!" The Typicon of Father I. Dolnytsky says that there is no such custom in our Church of kissing one another, but that the faithful merely came up to the priest and kiss the cross, the Holy Gospel Book, the Artos with the icon of the Resurrection of our Lord tied to the top of it and other icons, and greet one

another with the words: "Christ is risen!" while those greeted respond, "Indeed He is risen!"

The Easter salutation "Christ is risen" was spoken for the first time by the angel to the women at the Lord's tomb. This joyful greeting has already, for hundreds and hundreds of years, echoed among our people throughout the entire Paschal season. By this salutation we express the joy of Easter (the Resurrection) and profess our faith both in Christ's resurrection and our own.

On the day of the Resurrection the Divine Liturgy is carried out with great solemnity. The Easter Gospel speaks of the divinity of Jesus Christ, because His resurrection is the supreme proof of His divinity. If many priests are concelebrating, then the Gospel is read in several languages, customarily in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, for these are the languages used for the inscription on the cross of Christ. The Gospel is also read in the language or languages of the faithful. The reading of the Gospel in different languages signified that the doctrine of Christ is proclaimed in all languages and to all peoples. After each sentence of the Gospel, the church bells are rung, to symbolize that the good news of Christ is being proclaimed to all creatures.

During the entire Bright Week the royal or holy doors of the iconostas remain open as a sign that Christ opened to us the doors of the Kingdom of God, as we sing in the paschal canon "You have opened to us the gates of Paradise..." (Ode 6)

On the day of the Resurrection during the Divine Liturgy after the Prayer behind the Ambo, the blessing of the Artos takes place. Artos is a Greek word which means "bread". It is the symbol of the bread of everlasting life — our Lord Jesus Christ. The Artos is a bread on the top of which an icon is tied representing Christ coming forth in glory with a flag of victory in his hand, from the grave. The Artos is placed on the tetrapod for the people to kiss as a reminder of Christ's presence among them, or it is placed on the altar and remains there throughout the entire Bright Week until Bright Saturday when it is cut up into pieces and distributed to the faithful on the Sunday of St. Thomas.

During the season of the Pentecost, which extends from the Pasch (Easter) to the Descent of the Holy Spirit, as a sign of the joy of the Resurrection we do not make any bows, nor do we kneel. The Council of Nicea (325) gave us the following

rule regarding this matter: "Since there are some who kneel on the day of the Lord and during the season of the Pentecost, for the sake of uniformity in all eparchies, the Council decrees that during that time prayers be offered up to God while standing." (Canon 20) A similar decree was issued by the Sixth Ecumenical Council in the 90th rule.

During the day of the Resurrection, and in some places even throughout the whole Bright Week, church bells are rung all day long as a sign of Christ's victory over death and Hades.

### **National Folk Customs**

A very common and cherished custom among our people is the blessing of food and pastry on the day of the Resurrection. After the long fast, holy Church permits the faithful to eat any kind of food so that during the Easter season they may experience together with spiritual joy, the joy derived from the gifts of the earth. For this reason she blesses these gifts and dispenses from fasting during the entire Bright Week. After the Divine Liturgy, the paschal food is solemnly blessed outside the Church.

Shells from blessed eggs, crumbs and bones were not thrown out, but were buried either in the garden, or in the field, so that the earth, too, might receive some blessed matter. In certain localities in Galicia shells from the blessed eggs were thrown on the roof tops of the house.

Closely associated with the blessing of the Easter bread or as we say in Ukrainian "pascha" are our famous colored Easter-eggs. Their origin is very ancient. Among the ancient peoples a custom prevailed which required that one did not appear before a great personage for the first time without presenting a gift. A pious tradition relates that Mary Magdalene, when preaching the Gospel, first appeared in the court of Emperor Tiberius, she presented him with an egg painted red, saying: "Christ is risen," and with that greeting she began her sermon. Other Christians, following her example also began to present one another with a colored egg on the day of the Resurrection (Easter).

The main reason that the egg plays such a role in Easter customs is that it is regarded as a symbol of Christ's resurrection. Just as from the dead shell of the egg a new life emerges



*Drawing by J. Hrizdowsky*

so too Christ came forth from the grave to a new life. The red painted egg is the symbol of our salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ. Closely connected with the colored Easter-eggs are the various games in which both children and adults participate on the day of the Resurrection.

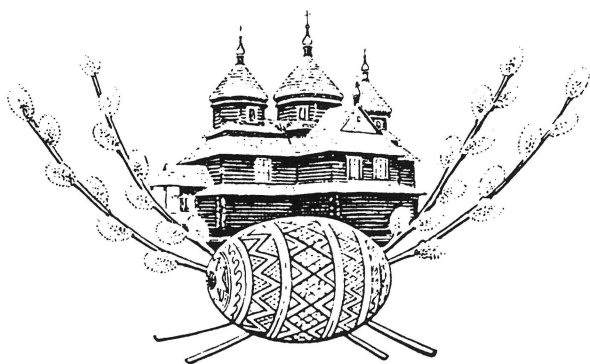
A special expression of the joy of the Resurrection in the villages of Ukraine were the secular spring songs and the various games which took place in the area near the church. "It is strange," says Professor S. Kylymnyk, "that the spring songs composed by our ancient ancestors already in the fourth-sixth centuries (perhaps even earlier) during the time of the State of the Antae, have come down to us through the obscurity of thousands of years, and centuries of great calamities, wars, invasions, and subjugation — and have retained their predominant thought, main idea and content with only the change of words from ancient to modern. The spring songs are a priceless treasure of the early culture of our ancient ancestors. They are highly artistic and even unparalleled works of poetry, historical documents that speak to us of the life, ideals, psychology, faith and belief, understanding of

nature, and the longing of our ancestors to understand natural phenomena." (Opus cit., pp. 106-107)

In certain localities of Ukraine it was customary on the day of Resurrection for families to visit the graves of their beloved dead, in order to share with them the joy of the Resurrection and to salute them with the greeting of the Resurrection. At the Kievan Pecherska Lavra following the resurrection services, the monks and the faithful descended into the underground caves in order to announce to the deceased monks the news of Christ's resurrection.

In ancient times, a custom prevailed of building fires on Easter night to greet spring and the vernal sun. These fires, in Christian religion, came to symbolize those fires which the soldiers, guarding the grave of Christ, kindled during the night, and they symbolize our greeting of the Sun of Truth — the Risen Christ.

From the very rich treasure of our religious and cultural traditions we have described only a few, but even these clearly express the deep faith, strong traditions, high culture and noble spirit of our Ukrainian people, as well as their deep love for their own rite. "The wealth and great value of the ritual customs of our folklore," says Professor S. Kylymnyk, "is immense. The most cultured nations of the world could envy us. These treasures of the high culture of our past — mirror our national spirit and are veritable witnesses to the eternal longing of our people for freedom, perfection, beauty and the sun." (op. cit., p. 97)



# The Season of Holy Pentecost

On the fortieth day after His glorious resurrection Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, and on the fiftieth day sent down the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. For this reason, the fifty day period extending from Easter to the feast of the Descent of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost) is called the season of Pentecost. The feast of Pentecost or the Descent of the Holy Spirit bears the same name.

Great feasts are usually celebrated for several days after the feast itself. This continuation of the celebration is called the post-feast. The feast of the Pasch, the most prominent and solemn of all the feasts, has the longest post-festive period; it lasts until the feast of the Ascension of our Lord. During this period the services begin and end with the hymn of the Resurrection: "Christ is risen from the dead..." The Sundays of the Pentecost season are named according to the Gospel event of the day. The Gospel events and the services of those Sundays have for their purpose the glorification of the risen Christ and the strengthening of our faith in his divinity. During the period of Pentecost we celebrate three feasts that deserve our special attention: 1) the Sunday of Thomas, 2) the Mid-feast i.e., the "Middle Wednesday" or Mid-Pentecost (in Ukrainian "perepolovynennya" or "Half-Way" — that is, the half-way mark or midway of the Pentecostal season or Mid-Pentecost) and 3) the Ascension of our Lord.

## Thomas Sunday

The Sunday following Easter Sunday also has the following names:

**The Sunday of St. Thomas** — from the Gospel event in which St. Thomas meets the risen Christ.

**The Sunday of the Anti-pasch** — Anti-pasch is a Greek word signifying "in place of, instead of the Pasch", for, to the Christians, this Sunday was, so to speak, a repetition of the

feast of the Resurrection (Easter). In the Diary of a Pilgrimage written by Silvia of Aquitaine (4c) we read that on the eighth day after the Resurrection of Christ there were special celebrations in Jerusalem and that, on this day, the Gospel relating to the conversion of St. Thomas was read.

**The New Sunday or The Sunday of Renewal or Renovation** — for it was on the first Sunday after the Resurrection that the celebration of the Pasch was, as it were, renewed. On this day Christ, himself, by appearing to His Apostles, renewed the joy of the Resurrection. “On this day,” says the Synaxary of Thomas Sunday, “the first Sunday after the Resurrection, we celebrate the renewal of Christ’s resurrection and the touching of His wounds by St. Thomas.”

**White Sunday or Sunday “in white”** — In ancient times the neophytes or the newly baptized, having received the Sacrament of Baptism on Great Saturday, wore a white garment throughout the entire Bright Week, and on the Sunday of St. Thomas they put aside this garment during a special ceremony. To this day the Western Church calls this Sunday “Sunday in White” or White Sunday.

**The Leading Sunday or the First Sunday after Easter (the Pasch)** — Some authors derive this name from the fact that this Sunday is the leading Sunday, i.e., the first Sunday that continues the feast of the Pasch. Among our people there existed an old custom, on the Sunday of St. Thomas, of commemorating the dead with a special memorial repast and praying for their souls at the cemetery.

The celebration of the eighth day after the Pasch as the conclusion of Bright Week, from earliest times, had been regarded as a separate feast. The theme of the services of this feast and of the week that follows is the Gospel event describing the apparition of Christ on the eighth day after His Resurrection and the moving scene of St. Thomas’ conversion and profession of faith. Regarding the significance of this feast, St. Gregory the Theologian (†389), in a homily on the Sunday of St. Thomas said: “The old law, which was established for a good purpose, honors the day of renewal, or rather, should we say, that with the day of renewal it honors new blessings. For, was not the first day of the resurrection, which occurred after the holy and glorious night, also a day of renewal? Why, then, do we give this name to today’s feast? That day (i.e. of the Resurrection) was a day of salvation, while this day is the



commemoration of salvation. By its very nature, that day separates the burial and the resurrection, while this day is a day of an altogether new birth... Today we celebrate a genuine renewal, going from death to life. Therefore, cast off the old man and renew yourselves and live in newness of life."

Our Church celebrates the memory of St. Thomas the Apostle on the 6th of October, whereas the Latin Church celebrates it on the 21st of December. About the apostolic work of St. Thomas, in a homily delivered on Thomas Sunday, St. John Chrysostom eulogizes St. Thomas thus: "Of all the other Apostles he was, at one time, the weakest in faith but, with God's grace, he became more courageous and more untiring than the rest. He traversed almost the whole known world, preaching the word of God fearlessly to nations that were fierce, savage and bloodthirsty." St. Thomas is believed to have died a martyr's death for the Christian faith in India.

### **The Mid-Pentecost**

On Wednesday after the Sunday of the Paralytic, which falls exactly in the middle of the Pentecost season, that period between Easter (the Resurrection) and the feast of the Pentecost or Descent of the Holy Spirit, the Eastern Church celebrates the feast of Mid-Pentecost which may mean "Half Way" because it is the half-way mark between the feast of Easter and the feast of the Pentecost, or "Middle Wednesday" since it falls on the Wednesday in the middle of the Pentecostal season. In Church Slavonic this Wednesday or feast is called "Prepolovynennya"; in English "Half Way" (midway) (or Mid-Pentecost). The Synaxary of that day explains the reason for the institution of this feast: "On the Wednesday of the Paralytic we celebrate the feast of Mid-Pentecost for the sake of honoring the two great feastdays — Easter and the Pentecost. The feast of Mid-Pentecost unites and joins these two feasts." The feast of Mid-Pentecost has an eight day post-feast which lasts to the Wednesday after the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman.

The reason for this feast is based on the Gospel of St. John in which it is written: "When, however, the feast (i.e., the feast of Tabernacles) was already half over, Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach." (John 7, 14) There he spoke of his divine mission and of miraculous water: "My teaching is

not my own, but his who sent me... If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture says, 'from within him there shall flow rivers of living waters.' He said this, however, of the Spirit whom they, who believed in him, were to receive." (John 7,16; 37-39)

This feast was already observed at the time of St. John Chrysostom (†407). The liturgy or service for the feast of Mid-Pentecost was composed by Anatolius, Patriarch of Constantinople (†458), St. Andrew of Crete, (†740), St. John Damascene (†749) and St. Theophane the Confessor (†817).

The feast of the Mid-Pentecost aims to strengthen our faith in the risen Christ, to inspire us to observe the commandments of God and to predispose us for the feast of the Ascension of our Lord and the Descent of the Holy Spirit. In the Matins service of that day at the Sticheras of Praises we sing: "Brethren, having been enlightened by the resurrection of the Saviour Jesus Christ, and having reached the half-way mark of the feast of the Lord, let us sincerely observe the commandments of God, so that we may become worthy to celebrate the Ascension and receive the coming of the Holy Spirit."

### **The Ascension of Our Lord**

The feast of the Lord's Ascension always falls on a Thursday, on the fortieth day after Christ's resurrection. This is one of the principal feastdays of our Lord and therefore, has a post-feast of nine days. It celebrates the memory of Christ's Ascension into heaven and underscores its significance for Christ and for us. St. John Chrysostom, in his homily on the Ascension says: "Today the human race is completely reconciled with God. The ancient battle and enmity have disappeared. We, who were unworthy to live even on earth — are now lifted up to heaven. Today we become heirs to the kingdom of heaven, we, who do not even deserve earth, we ascend to heaven and inherit the throne of the King and Lord. Human nature, against which the cherubim guarded paradise, is now raised up above all the cherubim."

Sources of the first three centuries do not speak of this feast. Not even the writer Origen (†251) mentions it, although he lists the Christian feasts in the eighth book of his work "Against Celsus". Liturgical experts are of the opinion that in



the first three centuries the celebration of this feast was combined with that of the feast of the Descent of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost). Silvia Egeria does not call this feast the "Ascension", but only "the fortieth day after the resurrection of Christ."

In the fourth century the feast of the Lord's Ascension became a universal feast, celebrated everywhere. The Historian Socrates (†c.440) calls it a "general feast". (History of the Church, 7,26)

The feast of the Ascension was highly extolled in the sermons of St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Epiphany of Cyprus, Leo the Great and others. In the fourth century, Queen Helena erected a church at the place of Christ's Ascension in honor of this feast.

The spirit of the services of this feast, as a whole, is uplifting and joyful. The Church rejoices at the glory of Christ (God and Man), who is now seated at the right hand of the Father. He ascended into heaven, in order to send us the Comforter — the Holy Spirit — and to "prepare a place for us," (John 14,2) as he promised.

"The Lord ascended into heaven," we sing in the first stichera of the Great Vespers service of the feast of the Ascension, "in order to send the Comforter to the world. Therefore, heaven prepared a throne for him and the clouds assisted him in his ascent. The angels wonder as they see a man more exalted than they. The Father receives into his bosom him, who is eternally with him. The Holy Spirit commands all his angels: 'Lift up your gates' lintels, O princes; all you nations clap your hands; for Christ has ascended whither He was before."

## The Feast of the Pentecost

*“We have seen the true light, we have received the Heavenly Spirit, we have found the true faith, we worship the undivided Trinity, for It has saved us.”  
(Stichera of Solemn Vespers of the Feast of the Pentecost)*

The glorious feast of the Resurrection concludes with a feast also most glorious and great — and that is, the feast of the Pentecost. After the Nativity and Resurrection of our Lord this feast belongs to the greatest feasts in the Ecclesiastical Year. The Descent of the Holy Spirit is, as it were, the seal on the work of the salvation of the human race accomplished by the Son of God. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit himself anoints the Apostles as preachers of the Good News of Christ. On this day the Church was born and began to function. The Holy Spirit ever guides, enlightens, sanctifies and preserves her on the path of truth.

“When the work the Father gave to the Son to do on earth was accomplished,” says The Vatican Council, “the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of the Pentecost in order that He might continually sanctify the Church, and thus all those who believe would have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father... The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple. In them, He prays on their behalf and bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons... By the power of the Gospel He makes the Church keep the freshness of youth. Uninterruptedly, He renews it and leads it to perfect union with its Spouse.” (Constitution on the Church, §4)

The holy feast of Pentecost deserves our special attention because of its history, liturgy, and significance.

## **The Old Testament Pentecost**

The Jewish people in ancient times celebrated three great feasts annually: the feast of the Passover, the feast of the Pentecost and the feast of Tabernacles. In the Book of Exodus we read: "Three times every year you shall celebrate feasts to me. You shall keep the feast of the unleavened bread. You shall keep the feast of the harvest of the first-fruits of your work, whatsoever you have sown in the field, and the feast also in the end of the year, when you have gathered in all your crops out of the field." (Exodus 23,14-16)

The feast takes its name from the fiftieth day after the feast of the Passover, and also from the fiftieth day from the beginning of the harvest. Pentecost is a Greek word which means "the fiftieth day". Originally, Pentecost was a feast of harvest and thanksgiving. On that day, according to the prescription of the law, great crowds of Jews would flock to Jerusalem even from distant lands, to render thanks to the Lord for the fruits of the earth and to make an offering of these fruits in the temple. Later, the Jews connected the feast of Pentecost as a feast of the harvest with an event in the history of Israel, in this case, with the anniversary of the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai on the fiftieth day after their departure from Egypt.

## **The Christian Pentecost**

The Apostles and first Christians retained from the Old Testament the feast of the Passover as well as the feast of the Pentecost. They also preserved the name, Pentecost, because, for them, it was also the fiftieth day after the Pasch (Resurrection); however, they attached to it an altogether different significance.

The principal motive for celebrating Pentecost in the Church of the New Testament was the event of the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. Thus, this feast is also called the day of the Descent of the Holy Spirit or the day of the Holy Trinity.

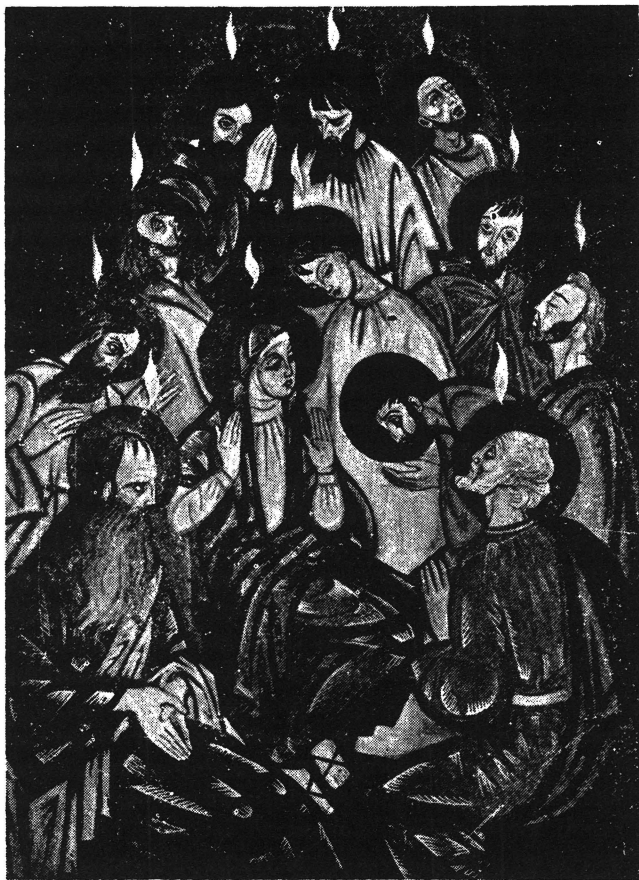
The Descent of the Holy Spirit was, for the primitive Christian Church, such a joyous, solemn and significant occasion, that they placed this feast on the same level with the feasts of the Resurrection and the Nativity of Christ. The celebration of this feast, like the feast of the Resurrection, in

time, was extended to an entire week, during which the faithful also enjoyed the privilege of Free Days. In the third century, this feast became universally known. The service, honoring this feast, was composed in the eighth century by St. John Damascene and St. Cosmas of Maiuma.

The liturgy of this day is full of joy and praise of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Trinity. "Come all you nations," we sing in the stichera from the Vespers service of this feast, "let us worship the Divinity in Three Persons, the Son in the Father with the Holy Spirit. The Father from eternity had begotten the Son, co-eternal and co-reigning with him; and the Holy spirit was in the Father, glorified with the Son — one Power, one Being, one Substance, one Godhead, which we all worship, saying: 'Holy God — who created everything through the Son with help of the Holy Spirit; Holy Mighty One — through whom we knew the Father, and through whom the Holy Spirit came to the world; Holy Immortal One — Spirit, Comforter, who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son, O Holy Trinity, glory be to you'". In the Matins service, at the Sticheras of Praises, we praise the Holy Spirit: "The Holy Spirit was, is and always will be. He is without beginning and without end, equal in essence with the Father and with the Son. He is life and the giver of life; he is light and the giver of light, he is all good and the fountain of all goodness..."

The following well-known prayer to the Holy Spirit from the service of the Pentecost found its way into our daily prayers: "Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of truth, everywhere present and filling all things, Treasury of good things and Giver of life, come and dwell in us and cleanse us of all stain and save our souls, O Good One." All our church services begin with this prayer.

The Church of the Old Testament had a custom on the feast of Pentecost of covering the floor of their homes and synagogues with fresh grass and adorning their homes and synagogues with the branches of trees and with flowers as a sign that, when the Law of God was given at Mount Sinai, all nature was in bloom. Presumably, the Apostles also observed this custom and decorated the upper room with greenery and flowers. This custom was also taken over by the Church of the New Testament. From this custom, Pentecost received another name namely, "Green Sunday". Flowers and greens are a sign of life and therefore became a symbol of the life-



*Edward Kozak*

giving Spirit. Just as nature in springtime is renewed with greens and flowers, so too, holy Church and her faithful are renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

On the Monday following the feast of the Pentecost, our Church celebrates the feast of the Holy Spirit. The feast of Pentecost commemorates the event itself of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, while Monday is dedicated to paying special worship to the Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity. In regard to this special worship, the Monday Synaxary says: "On this day, i.e., the Monday of Pentecost, we honor that all-holy and life-giving and all-powerful Spirit, one God in the Holy Trinity, one in dignity, one in nature, and

one in glory with the Father and with the Son... Out of deep reverence for the all-holy Spirit the Holy Fathers decreed that a separate feast be celebrated also during the Pentecost, in honor of Him who is the author of all that is good."

The Synods of Zamost and Lviv, when listing all the feasts, call this day the feast of the Holy Trinity. The Typicon of Father I. Dolnytsky calls this day simply the Monday of the Pentecost, and says that, on this day, the entire service of the feast of the Descent of the Holy Spirit is used and "in the Divine Liturgy the service of the feast of the Holy Trinity may also be used, if one desires." He noted that neither the Greek nor the Slavonic typicons, except for our Sluzhebnyks (Liturgikons=Missals), have this service, which must be celebrated only in churches dedicated to the Holy Trinity. Since the Middle Ages the Latin Church keeps the feast of the Holy Trinity on the eighth day after the Pentecost, that is, on our Sunday of All Saints. Prince Maximilian, a Roman Catholic priest, in his "Lectures on the Eastern Liturgies", says that "Ukrainian Catholics, imitating the Latin Church, celebrate the feast of the Holy Trinity on the Monday after the Pentecost (p. 99). Actually, the feast of the Pentecost, properly speaking, is the feast of the Holy Trinity, as is evident from the name and the content of the service of that day.

The Vespers service of Monday merits special attention. Ordinarily it is not performed on Sunday evening, but immediately after the Divine Liturgy around noontime on the very day of the Pentecost. The linking of the Vespers service with the Divine Liturgy is explained by Father I. Dolnytsky as an opportunity for the faithful who are present at the Divine Liturgy to take part in the prayers which are read while kneeling. This Vespers service, characterized by three special prayers of a penitential nature, were allegedly composed by St. Basil the Great (†379). The Byzantine Canonist Matthew Blastares (14th c.) testifies in his Nomocanon that St. Basil the Great also directed that these prayers be said while kneeling, as a sign of great respect for the Holy Spirit.

### **The Significance of the Feast of the Descent of the Holy Spirit**

The event of the descent of the Holy Spirit was most fruitful in its effects and had great significance for the Apostles



and the first Christians; it has this same significance for the whole Church everywhere and always. St. John Chrysostom in his homily on the feast of the Pentecost says: "The all gracious God today bestowed upon us gifts, too great to be adequately expressed in words. Therefore, let us all rejoice together, and while rejoicing, let us praise our God... For I ask, what was given to us for our salvation that was not given to us by the Holy Spirit? He freed us from slavery, adopted and called us to the freedom of the children of God. From this fountain (i.e. the Holy Spirit) flow prophecies, the grace of healing, and all the other gifts and fruits with which the Church is wont to adorn herself." In the sticheras of the Great Vespers service of Pentecost we read: "The Holy Spirit is the giver of all gifts. He pours forth prophecies, perfects the priesthood, teaches wisdom to the illiterate, and transforms fishermen into theologians; he brings together into one community the entire Church of God. O Comforter, one with the Father in nature and co-reigning with Him, glory to you."

"Through the Holy Spirit," says St. Basil the Great, "our return to paradise is achieved, we are elevated to the heavenly kingdom, and become once more the children of God. Through Him we are able to call God, Father; we are able to become partakers of the grace of Jesus Christ, to be called children of light, and to share in everlasting glory..." (On the Holy Spirit, ch. 15)

The Holy Spirit bestowed upon the Apostles the gift of tongues, the gift of understanding the Scriptures, and the gift of fortitude in preaching and professing the holy faith. "On the day of Pentecost," says the Second Vatican Council, "the Holy Spirit came down upon the disciples to remain with them forever. The Church was publicly displayed to the multitude, the Gospel began to spread among the nations by means of preaching, and there was presaged that union of all peoples in the catholicity of the faith by means of the Church of the New Covenant, a Church which speaks all tongues, understands and accepts all tongues in her love..." (On Mission Activity of the Church, p. 4)

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are truly numerous and great. St. Paul speaks of them in his letter to the Galatians: "But the fruit of the Spirit is: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness and goodness, faith, modesty, continency." (Gal. 5,22-23) The Holy Spirit has also descended upon us with his gifts in the

Sacrament of Confirmation and he has anointed us as soldiers of Christ and made our bodies His temples. St. Paul reminds us of this great truth, admonishes and exhorts us to live accordingly: "Do you not know that your members are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought at a great price. Glorify God and bear Him in your body." (I Cor. 6,19-20)



*Wooden Cathedral of the Holy Trinity (1773-79)*

## Sunday of All Saints

*“We extol you, Apostles, Martyrs,  
Prophets and all Saints, and we  
honor your holy memory, as you pray  
for us to Christ our God.”  
(Hymn of Praise of the Sunday of  
All Saints)*

The eighth Sunday after the Resurrection, that is, the first Sunday after Pentecost, is called the Sunday of All Saints. This feast completes the cycle of moveable feasts. On this day the Eastern Church pays particular veneration to all those who are the fruit of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

“On this day, that is, the Sunday of Pentecost,” we read in the Synaxary of this Sunday, “we celebrate the feast of all Saints all over the whole world — in Asia, Libya, Europe, in the north and in the south. Our holy Fathers instituted this feast and directed it to be kept after the feast of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, as if to set before us an example of how the coming of the all-Holy Spirit enabled them to attain sanctity. He made holy and all wise those who were of the same nature as we in order to give them the place forfeited by the fallen angels. Through Christ, he brought them to God — some through suffering and martyrdom; others through perseverance in the life of heroic virtue.”

The Deacon Constantine (6c) of Constantinople, in his sermon on the first Sunday after the descent of the Holy Spirit says: “The Greek Church, by a distinguished and very illustrious feast, honors the memory of those immortal flowers which the whole earth brings forth from that soil which is continuously refreshed by the flowing streams of the Holy Spirit.”

Here, let us briefly examine the history of this feastday, our rationale for venerating the saints, and our fundamental obligation to imitate them.

## **History of the Feast**

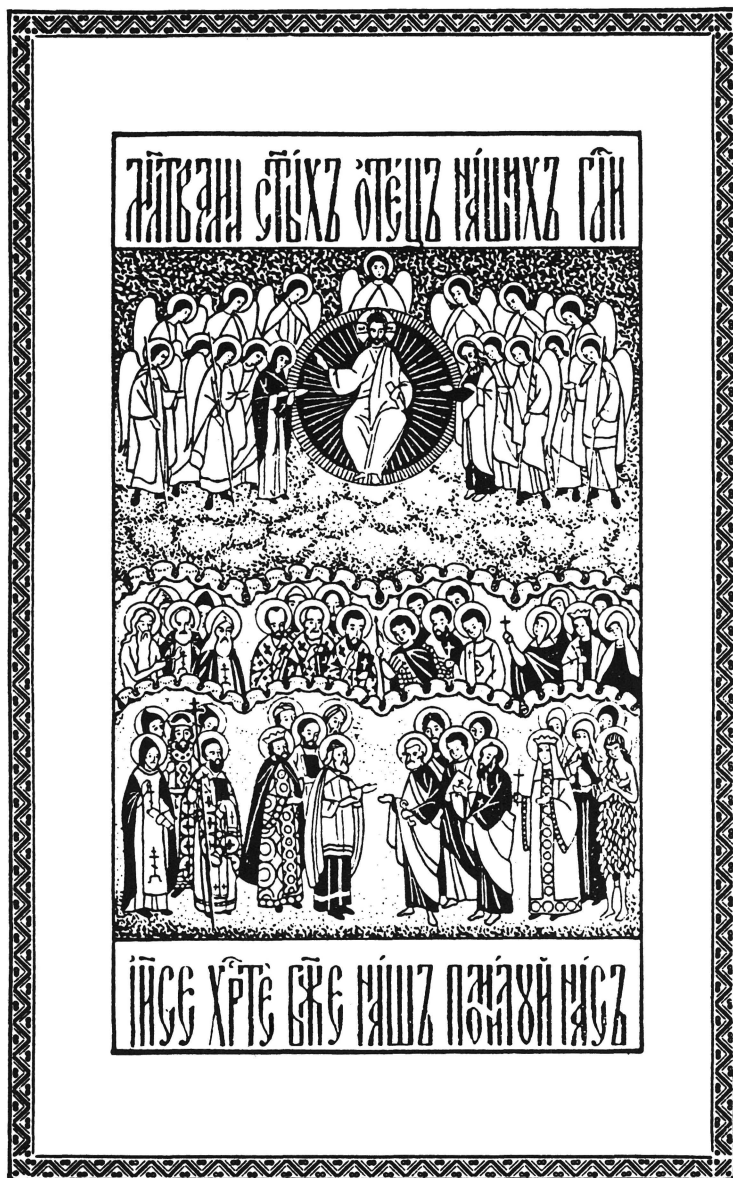
### **1. In the Eastern Church**

The veneration of the saints began with the death of the first martyrs of the Christian era. The cult of the Martyrs in later centuries incorporated also the cult of the apostles, bishops and ascetics, and religious of both sexes. Emperor Constantine the Great (†337) built a church in Constantinople in memory of the Twelve Apostles.

Before long, the cult of the New Testament saints was extended to include that of the Old Testament saints. St. Cyril of Jerusalem (†386) in his fifth Mystagogical Catechesis attests that during the Divine Liturgy after the consecration "we commemorate those who have fallen asleep before us, first, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, so that through their prayers and intercession, God may receive our petition. Afterwards, we commemorate the Holy Fathers and bishops who have fallen asleep before us..." Our Church commemorates the Old Testament Saints on the Sunday of the Forefathers and Fathers before the feast of the Nativity of our Lord. Some of these saints also have a special day of their own dedicated to them during the year.

Our Church Calendar dedicates each day in the year to one or more saints or classes of saints. There are multitudes of saints in heaven whose names are not recorded in the Church Calendar and whose names are unknown to the world even though they are forever inscribed in the Book of Life. Therefore, it is the wish of holy Church that fitting honor be paid to both the known and unknown saints in heaven. The first class of saints to be so honored were the holy martyrs. The feast of All Martyrs was kept in the Greek Church even during the time of St. John Chrysostom (†407). A eulogy in their honor delivered by him on the first Sunday after Pentecost remains extant. "Seven days had not yet passed," he says, "since we celebrated the holy feast of Pentecost, and once again the choir of martyrs received us, the faithful warriors and army, who do not yield to the army of angels, whom Jacob had seen, but are equally zealous and equal to them."

The earliest Syrian calendar (411) commemorates all martyrs on the Friday after the feast of the Resurrection. The Calendar of the Chaldean Catholics and Syrian Nestorians on



that same day commemorates All Confessors. In the fourth century in Edessa, (modern Turkey), the feast of All Martyrs was celebrated on the 13th of May. St. Ephrem the Syrian (†373) composed a special hymn for this day in honor of the Martyrs.

Evidently then, the feast of All Martyrs was not celebrated on the same day everywhere; some Churches observed it as a moveable, and others as an immoveable feast. No certainty exists as to when the feast of All Martyrs became the feast of All Saints celebrated on the first Sunday after Pentecost. Under Emperor Leo the Wise (886-911), however, it is certain that this feast was already generally observed in the East for he had erected a magnificent church in honor of All Saints. Father (Prince) Maximilian maintains that, in the East, the feast of All Saints was observed earlier than it was in the West." (Lectures on the Eastern Liturgies)

## **2. In the Western Church**

The Western Church keeps the feast of All Saints on the first of November. In the West as well as in the East, the feast of All Martyrs was first to be observed and it was kept at different times by the Latin Churches in various countries. St. Maxim of Turin (5c) has left a sermon in honor of All Martyrs that was delivered on the first Sunday after Pentecost. In 609 or 610 Pope Boniface IV received the Roman Pantheon from Emperor Phocas and dedicated it to the most Pure Virgin Mary and the martyrs on the 13th of May. From that time on, the anniversary of this dedication was celebrated annually with great solemnity. Some believe this marks the origin of the feast of All Saints.

Pope Gregory III (731-741) dedicated a chapel in the Basilica of St. Peter in honor of All Saints. The date of this dedication is unknown, but it is known that from that time on, certain countries began to celebrate the feast of All Saints on the first day of November. Sometime in the ninth or tenth century, the West began to celebrate the first of November as the feast of All Saints universally. Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) finally suppressed the celebration of the feast of All Saints on the 13th of May, transferring it to the first of November.

## **Motives for Venerating the Saints**

Many motives prompt us to venerate the saints and implore their intercession. Here we mention only a few.

By honoring the saints we honor God, for respect shown to

them is respect shown to God. The saints did not become saints by their own power — their holiness is the result of God's grace. All that they are, they owe to God. The Servant of God Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky said: "The veneration of saints not only does not oppose in any way the worship that is due to God but eminently contributes to it. We honor the saints as servants of God, as our heavenly protectors who intercede for us before God and obtain from Him, for us, the forgiveness of our sins and heavenly grace." (On the Veneration of Saints)

The saints are the closest friends of God, hence, the honor we pay to them is pleasing to God, for they loved God above all things. The Second Vatican Council encourages us to venerate the saints: "It is supremely fitting, therefore, that we love those friends and co-heirs of Jesus Christ who are also our brothers and sisters and extraordinary benefactors; that we render due thanks to God for them and suppliantly invoke them and have recourse to their prayers, their power and their help." (On the Constitution on the Church, 50)

All the saints are very close to us for they, like us, were once citizens of our earth and are of our own flesh and bone. They are members of the same Church as we are, although they belong to the Church Triumphant while we still struggle as members of the Church on earth or the Church Militant. They are not indifferent to our welfare and salvation. Hence, there exists no doubt that they readily listen to all our petitions and prayers and gladly present them before the throne of God.

The Deacon Constantine, in his above mentioned sermon — which was approved by the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787) — acknowledges, in these words, the protection of the Saints and the powerful effects of their intercession: "You are set over the whole human race as protectors of souls, healers of bodies, strong pillars of the faith, the perfection of priesthood, the forgiveness of sins, the foundation and support of the Churches, medicine for sickness, rest for travelers, the helm of those who sail, help to the sick, a defense for those in battle, a lift to those who have fallen, a strength to the afflicted, guides to those who have lost their way, guardians of the just, a consolation to those who mourn, a mighty aid to all and a refuge of firm hope."

## **Our Duty to Strive for Holiness of Life**

We are obliged, not only to venerate the saints and to seek the assistance of the saints, but also to imitate their life and holiness. All Christians are called to holiness by virtue of the sacrament of Baptism. Every person, regardless of status and condition of life, can become a Saint and is duty-bound to strive after holiness of life. Our Lord Jesus Christ addressed all people without exception when He said: "Therefore, be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5,48) St. Paul also reminds us of our duty to pursue holiness: "This is the will of God — your sanctification." (I Cor.4,3)

What is holiness? Holiness is living according to the commandments of God and the Church; it is the daily fulfillment of God's will, constant fidelity to the duties of one's state, or more briefly — holiness is the Gospel translated into action. The Servant of God Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky speaks beautifully of the significance of the Gospel for our life and holiness:

"In my opinion," he says, "the source of our failures and of all the plagues that afflict our church and national life, is our failure to apply ourselves seriously to living our Christianity and the teachings of the Gospel, and for this reason, we do not convey to others the aura of holiness... The Gospel is the road to heaven; it is a life without blemish, without reproach, without vice; it is a pure, innocent, holy life by which mortal man aspires to emulate the heavenly angels. The Gospel is the way of the cross leading to the hill of Golgotha. The Christian life is a life in which each person carries a cross, suffers, and follows in the footsteps of Jesus Christ... Life according to the teachings of the Gospel is the supernatural life of God's grace, a life of God's love and of the sacrifice for God or in a word: it is a life in which each person seeks and aspires to holiness of life." (On Education)

The saints in heaven, then, are God's beloved and intimate friends; and our protectors, intercessors and benefactors; our guides and models on the path to virtue and sanctity.





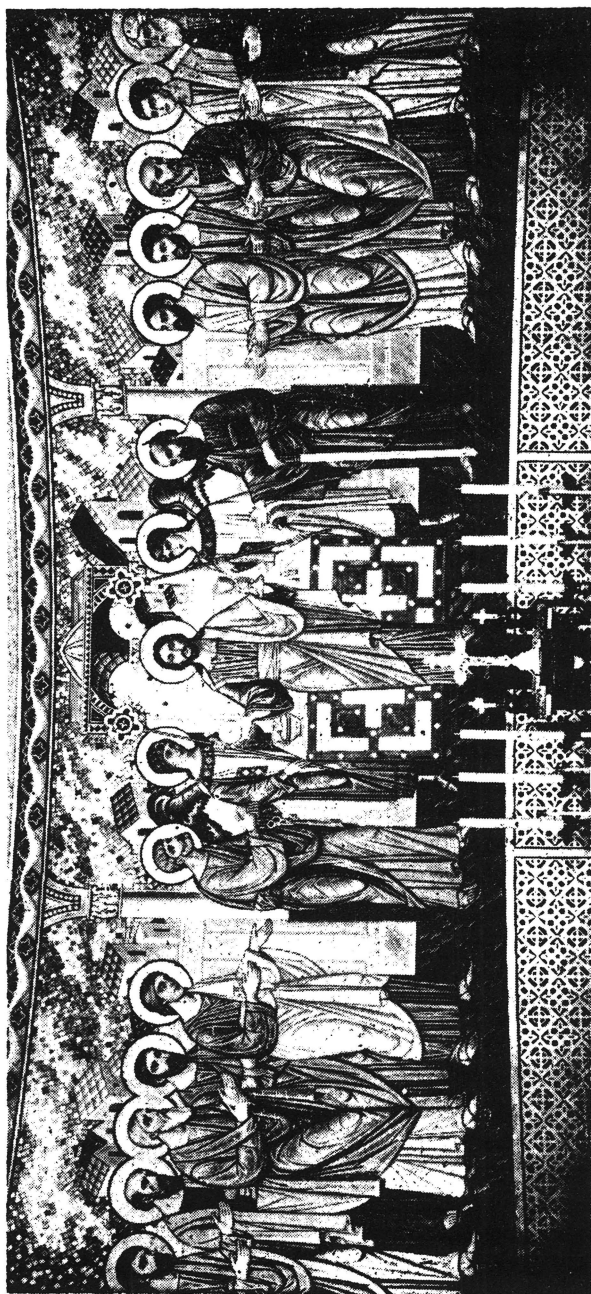
*Church of All Saints, Kiev (drawing by George Moshinsky)*

# The Feast of the Most Holy Eucharist

*"He who eats my flesh and drinks  
my blood has life everlasting and  
I will raise him up on the last day."  
(John 6,54)*

The Divine Liturgy, as the Unbloody Sacrifice, is the center of worship and the spiritual life of the Catholic Church. The reason for this is that, at the Divine Liturgy, the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist — a sacrament which surpasses all other sacraments — is offered up to God. The Second Vatican Council in the dogmatic constitution on the Church calls the Eucharistic Sacrifice "the fount and apex of the whole Christian life". (§11) And in the decree on the "Ministry and Life of the Priests" we read: "the Most Blessed Sacrament contains the entire spiritual boon of the Church, that is, Christ Himself, our Pasch and Living Bread, by the action of the Holy Spirit through His very flesh vital and vitalizing, giving life to men..." (§5)

In the Catholic Church the cult of the Most Holy Eucharist is as old as the institution of this sacrament itself. For many long centuries this cult was always exclusively associated, both in the East and the West, with the Divine Liturgy. It was not until the twelfth century that the Western Church, for various reasons, began to introduce a separate cult of the Most Holy Eucharist which had no connection with the Divine Liturgy itself. This cult consisted of the veneration of the Eucharistic Species (the Consecrated bread) preserved in the tabernacle. Immediately following this cult, various ritual practices developed which, until that time, had been unknown in the Church. In the Western Church, the veneration of the Eucharistic Christ in the tabernacle became the reason for the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi (the



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Body of the Lord). The Latin Church celebrates this feast on the Thursday after the conclusion or the last day of the post-feast of the Descent of the Holy Spirit. The institution of the Most Holy Eucharist is commemorated in both the Eastern and Western Churches on Great or Holy Thursday.

First, we shall consider the cult of the Most Holy Eucharist during the first millennium of the Church, and then we will examine the history of the feast of Corpus Christi in the Western Church.

### **The Most Holy Eucharist in the First Millennium of the Church**

At the Last Supper Jesus Christ instituted the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist so that the Holy Sacrifice might be offered up in the Church through all ages as the spiritual food of the faithful. According to the Second Vatican Council, "At the Last Supper, on the night when He was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until he should come again, and thus to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us." (§47)

From this it follows that the Most Holy Eucharist, in essence, is not an object, but an act of divine worship. Strictly speaking, the cult of the Most Holy Eucharist consists not in its preservation in the tabernacle, but in its being offered up as a sacrifice and distributed to the faithful in Holy Communion. In the first centuries of Christianity, the Consecrated Gifts were not preserved for veneration by the faithful, but were only held in reserve for the sick and dying. The manner of preserving the Holy Sacrament was very simple and unpretentious. It was preserved in either the sacristy, behind the altar, or in a receptacle resembling a dove suspended above the altar. Our present day tabernacles appeared at a very late date, much later than the sixteenth century.

To this day, certain Eastern Churches such as the Coptic, Syrian and Nestorian Churches, do not reserve the Blessed Sacrament at all. The sick are given Holy Communion im-

mediately after the Divine Liturgy. If someone should be in danger of sudden death, the priest offers the Divine Liturgy for that person no matter what hour of the day it is.

The early Fathers of both the Eastern and Western Churches knew of the cult of the Most Blessed Sacrament only in relation to the Divine Liturgy. For this reason they continuously call upon the faithful to participate frequently, and even daily, in the Holy Liturgy and Holy Communion. The first Christians loved and cherished the Holy Liturgy and Holy Communion to such an extent, that they willingly risked their lives to take part in them. They believed that to assist at the Divine Liturgy and to unite themselves with Christ in Holy Communion was the greatest grace and privilege, and to be excluded from participation in the Holy Liturgy and Holy Communion was the greatest punishment. All Orthodox Churches, even today, know the cult of the Most Holy Eucharist only in connection with the Divine Liturgy.

### **The Feast of Corpus Christi in the Western Church**

Beginning in the twelfth century, a movement arose in the Western Church that made the Holy Eucharist the object of a special cult outside the Divine Liturgy. Various reasons account for this movement. First of all, at that time theological controversies arose regarding the manner in which Christ was present under the species of bread and wine. As early as the eleventh century the heretic Berengarius of Tours (†1088) denied the real presence of Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist and recognized only a spiritual presence. Others who followed him in later centuries were Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. All these heresies were later condemned by the Council of Trent. In addition to this, the thirteenth century participation of the faithful in Holy Communion had declined drastically, and therefore adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was looked upon by many as a substitute for receiving the Eucharist.

The immediate motive, however, for the institution of a separate feast of the Most Holy Eucharist, namely "Corpus Christi", was a vision granted to the Blessed Juliana, a nun of Liege (†5th of June, 1258). Around 1209 she had frequently seen a vision of the full moon in all its splendour and brightness, but with one side of it in darkness. Blessed Juliana understood the moon as representing the Catholic Church and

the dark spot the lack of a special feast in honor of the Eucharistic Christ. She disclosed the vision to the authorities of the Church. In consequence of this, Robert, Bishop of Liege (1246) instituted the feast of the Most Blessed Sacrament in his diocese. This feast was celebrated for the first time in 1247 in the Church of St. Martin in Liege.

Afterwards the feast of the Most Holy Eucharist spread to other countries in Europe. In a special bull of the year 1264, Pope Urban IV commanded that this feast be celebrated throughout the entire Catholic Church under the name "Feast of Corpus Christi". However, the introduction of this feast in many localities, in the beginning, evoked resistance from the clergy. Pope Clement V at the Council of Vienna in the year 1311, again confirmed the ordinance of his predecessor regarding the feast of Corpus Christi. From that time, it became a universal feast in the entire Western Church.

The institution of the feast of Corpus Christi opened the doors to various church services and practices whose purpose was to increase devotion to the Eucharistic Christ. More and more, the tendency of not concealing the Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, but rather of exposing It for adoration either during the Divine Liturgy, a procession, or during other services developed. Thus, a new practice arose in the Latin Rite Mass — namely, the elevation of the Host after the consecration so that all present might see It. In the fourteenth century this practice became universal. Some priests went so far as to turn to the people after the consecration to show them the consecrated Host.

Since the fourteenth century the principal way of celebrating the feast of Corpus Christi has been that of carrying the Blessed Sacrament through the streets and public places. It appears that the first such procession took place in the city of Cologne, Germany in 1279. By the middle of the following century the procession of the Blessed Sacrament had already become an integral part of the celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi. At first, the Blessed Sacrament was carried in a veiled chalice or ciborium; later, It was carried in a special receptacle called monstrance (Latin = *monstrare* = to show, display, exhibit). This came into general use in the fifteenth century.

The desire to pay the greatest possible worship to the Eucharistic Christ gave rise to various practices, such as — the

frequent exposition of the Blessed Sacrament even during the Mass; benediction of the Blessed Sacrament at the end of the various devotions or the celebration of the Forty Hours devotion; nocturnal and perpetual adorations; and special Holy Hours.

## **The Second Vatican Council and the Holy Eucharist**

In its decrees the Second Vatican Council does not say much about the cult of the Holy Eucharist outside the context of the Divine Liturgy; however, it does strongly emphasize this cult in association with the Divine Liturgy. It also emphasizes the significance of the Divine Liturgy and Holy Communion for the life of the Church and the sanctification of the faithful. For this reason it strongly recommends frequent participation in the Divine Liturgy and frequent reception of Holy Communion. The decree on the Holy Liturgy states: "Nevertheless, the Liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows... From the Liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, as from a font, grace is poured forth upon us; and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed as toward their end..." (§10) "That a more perfect form of participation in the Mass whereby the faithful, after the priest's communion, receive the Lord's body from the same sacrifice, is strongly commended." (§55) "No Christian community is, however, built up unless it has its basis and center in the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist. From this, therefore, all education to the spirit of the community must take its origin." (Ministry and Life of Priests, §6)

The Holy Congregation of Rites, mindful of the desire of the Council — that the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and Holy Communion be the center of worship in the Church — issued a special "Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery" on the 25th of May, 1967. This instruction gives various prescriptions regarding the service of the Divine Liturgy and the exposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament. It forbids two Eucharistic services to be celebrated at the same time: "Care must be taken not to have two liturgical celebra-

tions at the same time in the same church, since it distracts the people's attention.

"This, above all, refers to the celebration of the Eucharist. It is precisely this distraction of the faithful that must be diligently avoided, especially when Divine Liturgies are simultaneously celebrated in the same church; and, when the Divine Liturgy is celebrated with the congregation on Sundays or holydays." (§17)

In regard to the purpose of preserving the Blessed Sacrament outside the Divine Liturgy, the Instruction recalls another Instruction of the Apostolic See of October 1, 1949 which pertained to this matter and declared: "It would be well to recall that the primary and original purpose of reserving the sacred species in the Church, outside Mass, is the administration of the Viaticum. Secondary ends are the distribution of communion outside Mass and the adoration of our Lord Jesus Christ concealed beneath these same species." (§49)

Finally, the Instruction prescribes that the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for the purpose of adoration be associated with the Divine Liturgy which is being celebrated on that day: "It is necessary that, when the exposition in question is solemn and prolonged, it should be begun at the end of the Mass in which the host to be exposed has been consecrated... While the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, the celebration of the Mass in the same area of the church is forbidden... This is because the celebration of the Mystery of the Eucharist includes, in a more perfect way, that spiritual communion to which exposition should lead the faithful." (§60-61)





# **The Feast of the Most Holy Eucharist in Our Church**

In the thirteenth century, the Latin Church instituted the feast in honor of the Holy Eucharist primarily to counteract the heresies which denied the Real Presence of Jesus Christ under the species of bread and wine. The celebration of this feast also influenced the Eastern Catholic Churches. In the course of time, the feast of Corpus Christi was adopted by the Syrian, Chaldean, Maronite, Armenian, Coptic, Melchite, and Italo-Greek Catholic Churches. By a decree of the Synod of Zamost this feast became obligatory also in our Ukrainian Catholic Church; this will be evident as we consider the history, development, and practice of the feast of the Holy Eucharist in our Ukrainian Catholic Church.

## **The Cult of the Holy Eucharist in the Ukrainian Church to the Synod of Brest**

By adopting the holy faith from Byzantium, our Ukrainian nation also accepted its thousand-year old tradition regarding the cult of the Holy Eucharist. As was earlier mentioned, this cult, which dates from Apostolic times, consists of the offering up of the Unbloody Sacrifice and of Holy Communion. Our Ukrainian Church, from the very moment that it adopted the Christian faith, also fostered this cult zealously. This has been treated a little more extensively in the chapter on the paschal or Easter Communion.

Here, it may be worthwhile to recall the teachings and prescriptions of two great luminaries of the Ukrainian Church — Metropolitan Peter Mohyla and the Servant of God Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky — on the cult of the Most Holy Eucharist.

The Metropolitan of Kiev, Peter Mohyla, in his Euchologion of the year 1646, enjoins that both the priests

and the laity observe great respect for the Most Holy Eucharist. The priests must handle the Blessed Sacrament with great reverence and piety, guard It, and pay It divine worship. They must enter the sanctuary with head uncovered and they are to make a deep reverence or bow before the Blessed Sacrament. When they leave the sanctuary they are to make a deep bow again before the Blessed Sacrament. Similarly, at the beginning and at the end of each service, they must make a deep bow.

Metropolitan Peter Mohyla enjoins those who serve around the altar to do likewise. They do not even dare to touch the altar, especially the Blessed Sacrament that rests upon it. Out of respect for the Blessed Sacrament, no one, who is not of the clergy, should enter the sanctuary. The sextons must frequently go to confession, receive Holy Communion, and live an upright and sober life. The priests are obliged to teach the people to kneel and pay homage to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament when they happen to meet the priest carrying the Holy Sacrament to the sick. The priests should admonish the faithful not to make a bow to the floor during the Divine Liturgy at the Great Entrance, for these Gifts are not as yet consecrated.

Similarly, the Servant of God Andrew Sheptytsky demanded that utmost reverence be shown to the Blessed Sacrament on the altar. "The holiest place in the church," he says in a pastoral letter of 1900, "is the Altar of God and on it, the tabernacle — the palace of Christ... The altar is the holiest place because the most holy Sacrifice of the Divine Liturgy is offered on it, and because the all-holy Lord of heaven and earth dwells upon it under the species of bread. That place is so sacred that a Christian is not even allowed to touch it. Only the priests, who are consecrated to the service of God, approach it with fear, and always with a pure conscience. The Altar is so holy that not a single thing is permitted to be placed on it which is not prescribed by our holy rite." (Pastoral Letter, 1900)

Thus, the charge which is sometimes made by members of the Latin Rite — that in the Eastern Church there is no fitting worship of the Most Holy Eucharist — is groundless; in the first millennium the Holy Fathers of both the Eastern and

Western Churches and the entire Church of Christ prove the charge false.



It is true that there is no theological difficulty regarding the veneration of the Most Holy Eucharist outside the Divine Liturgy because, once the bread has been consecrated, it remains consecrated for as long as the species of bread is preserved. The real difficulty is that such a practice is not in the tradition of the Church, but departs from the chief purpose of its institution, and can even serve to prevent the faithful from taking part in the Divine Liturgy and from receiving Holy Communion. Although the same Christ resides in the tabernacle as is present in the Divine Liturgy, the tabernacle must not take precedence over the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and Holy Communion for, strictly speaking, they alone are the essential acts of Eucharistic worship.

In the East no one has ever denied the real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, hence, there has been no need to emphasize this presence by a special devotion outside the Divine Liturgy.

### **The Cult of the Most Holy Eucharist from the Time of the Union to the Synod of Lviv**

Our bishops stood by the above-mentioned tradition when they entered into union with the Latin Church at the Synod of

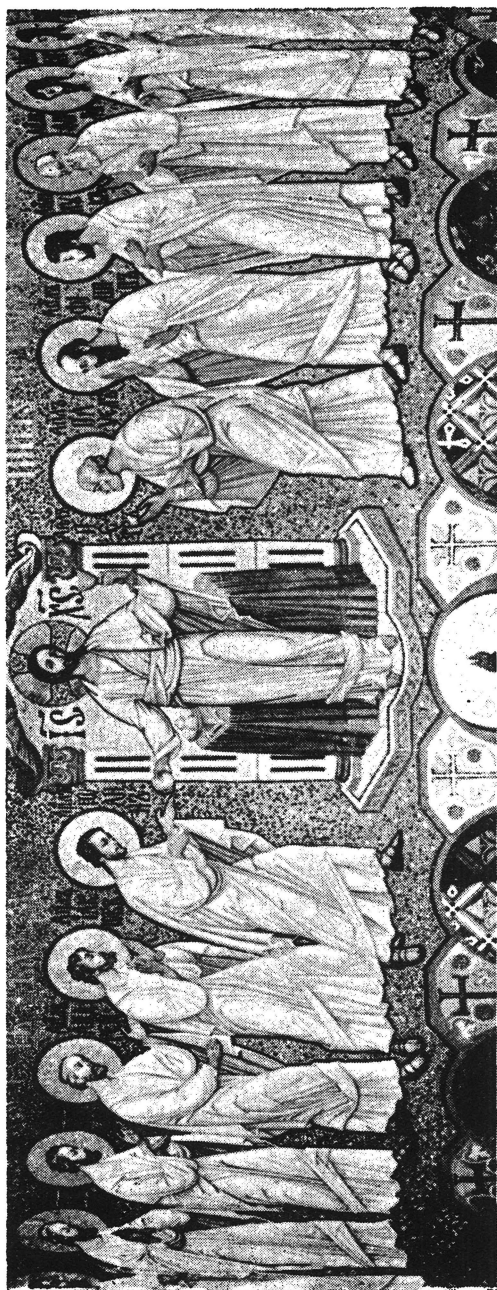
Brest in 1596. They so cherished the tradition of the Eastern Church and its customs that they were afraid they might be forced to accept the procession connected with the feast of Corpus Christi. Hence, in the articles pertaining to the Union, dated June 1, 1595, they inserted a special clause in this regard: "That we not be forced into accepting the procession connected with the feast of Corpus Christi...because we have a different manner of venerating this Sacrament." (§7) They also reserved for themselves the following right: "That it not be forbidden to go to the sick with the Blessed Sacrament publicly, with candles, and in vestments according to our prescriptions." (§23)

Although our bishops, when entering the Union, strongly desired that the traditions and customs of the Eastern Church be faithfully observed, nevertheless, immediately following the Union, attempts were already made in our Church to incorporate the practices of the Latin rite into our divine services, as far as possible. Slowly, the idea developed that the more closely we identify with the Latin rite, the better Catholics we will be. Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky speaks of this pro-Latin attitude of our uniatic Church: "It appeared to our fathers, before and after the Synod of Zamost, that, in order to merit the reputation of being true Catholics among their closest Latin neighbors, as well as among the Latins of the Western European countries and in Rome, they must assimilate as many of the customs and practices of the Latin rite as possible. This view led a great number of our priests to accept, literally, unlawful customs from the Latin rite, not approved by the Apostolic See, nor even by our own Church authorities.

"The Russian Czarist Government, which was hostile to the faith and bent on destroying the Holy Union, also lent vigorous support to such tendencies toward latinization." (Pastoral Letter on Rites, 1941)

A full hundred years had not passed following the signing of the Union when our Metropolitan Cyprian Zhochowski (1674-1693) spoke at the "Lublin Colloquium" (1680) about such practices in our Church as the Forty Hours devotion, frequent exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, processions with the Blessed Sacrament and monstrances.

The Synod of Zamost (1720) decreed that the feast of Corpus Christi be celebrated also in our Church. Thus, we find the



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custom developing in our Church of exposing, more and more frequently, the Holy Sacrament during the various church services, even during the Divine Liturgy; of giving benediction with the Blessed Sacrament outside the Divine Liturgy; of holding processions with the Blessed Sacrament; and of using the Latin monstrances. Our service in honor of the Holy Eucharist appears in print for the first time in 1738.

### **The Feast of the Most Holy Eucharist and the Synod of Lviv**

The Synod of Lviv (1891) referring to the bull of Pope Urban IV, the decree of the Tridentine Council, and the practice of almost all the Eastern Catholic Churches, not only approved the feast of Corpus Christi, but also elevated it to the rank of a first-class feast of our Lord with an eight day post-feast, and commanded that it be celebrated annually on the Thursday after the Sunday of All Saints. However, since this placed it on a weekday, the Synod prescribed that its celebration be transferred to the following Sunday. On this Sunday, following the Prayer behind the Ambo, a procession is to be made with the Blessed Sacrament, from the church to four altars set up at different places. If this is not feasible, then a procession must be made around the church three times with the Blessed Sacrament before returning to the altar where the blessing or benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is given. The Typicon of Father I. Dolnytsky gives detailed prescriptions about how this procession with the Blessed Sacrament to the four altars is to be conducted, and which Gospels are to be read at these altars.

The Synod of Lviv approved the custom long accepted in our Church, namely, the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament during the Divine Liturgy on the feast of the Most Holy Eucharist and on the feast of the church's patron Saint. On these days, there is to be benediction of the Blessed Sacrament; but on the feast of the Most Holy Eucharist, there is to be a double blessing — one at the beginning of the Liturgy, and the other at the end of the Liturgy, after the procession. Before the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, the prayer of Supplication is to be sung.

The Synod also permitted a procession with the Blessed Sacrament on other solemn occasions such as the feast of the

Resurrection (Easter), or the occasion of a mission or pilgrimage. When there is no procession, however, then on the feastdays and special days, the Blessed Sacrament is to be exposed and the Prayer of Supplication sung. When exposing the Blessed Sacrament, and during the procession on the feast of the Most Holy Eucharist, and on the feast of the patron Saint — the Synod prescribed the use of the monstrance, while on other occasions, a monstrance or ciborium (a sacred vessel, a chalice, in which is kept the Sacred Species of Eucharistic Consecrated bread, which is reserved for the communion of the sick or in other emergencies) may be used.

The Synod prescribed that the custom long accepted by our Church that of exposing the Blessed Sacrament on Great Friday and Saturday above the Lord's grave or on the altar, and also that of carrying it during the procession with the holy Shroud on Great Friday and before the Matins of the Resurrection of our Lord, be observed. (Title IV, ch. IV)

The Apostolic See, during the revision of our liturgical church service books in the 1940's, mindful of the decrees of the Synods of Zamost and of Lviv, and the tradition of our uniate Church, did not remove the feast of the Most Blessed Eucharist from our Church Calendar, but retained it under the name "The Solemn Veneration of the Most Pure Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Good and praiseworthy are the various veneration of the Holy Eucharist, but the most praiseworthy is that which best corresponds to the will of Christ our Lord, and which is compatible with the tradition of the Eastern Church and with the spirit of our rite; such a veneration is the love and appreciation for the Divine Liturgy and frequent Holy Communion. This is what Christ wants, this is what the Church encourages, this is what the needs of our soul demand.

Therefore, the cult of the Most Holy Eucharist as connected with the act of the Unbloody Sacrifice of the Divine Liturgy and Holy Communion, should, and must always, occupy first place in our Church. "There is no more holier, more majestic and more important act, —" says the Servant of God Andrew Sheptytsky, "than the awesome Sacrifice of the Divine Liturgy. When the priest approaches the altar, his function exceeds, in significance and holiness, all the deeds of man recorded in human history." (On the Service of the Divine Liturgy, 1942). As regards the significance of Holy

**Communion for our spiritual life, St. Pope Pius X says: “Holy Communion — is the shortest and surest way to heaven.”**





# The Feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

*"I have loved you with an everlasting love." (Jer. 31,3)*

"Christian piety," says the Servant of God Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky, O.S.B.M., "has struggled for centuries to give the fullest possible worship to Christ the Saviour, as God and as Man. The Church has instituted feast after feast to respond to this Christian piety and to inspire the faithful with the greatest possible love for Christ. It was natural then that the love of the Christ-Man for mankind also had to become a more concrete object of the Christian cult. Meditating on the love of Christ, the Church — under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who dwells in her and leads the faithful to the knowledge and love of God — had become more and more conscious of the fact that love is the basic cause of all that Christ has done for mankind. Love is the motive of all his actions. Because abstract concepts and ideas become more easily accessible, more concrete, and more easily understood when depicted by an image perceived by the senses, the veneration of the human love of Christ — and with it the entire internal, spiritual life of Christ — came to be represented in the universal Church by the Heart of Christ, and venerated as the symbol of his love." (From the Decrees of the Lviv Archeparchial Synod, 1940)

The cult of Christ's love, under the form of the veneration of the Heart of Christ, originated and developed in the bosom of the Western Church in the last several centuries. This cult gave rise to various devotions and practices; among them was the institution of a feast in honor of the Heart of Jesus. This cult also found fertile ground in our Ukrainian Catholic Church. Therefore, as a conclusion to the series of outlines on the moveable feasts, we shall say a few words also about the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

## **Cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the West**

Since the thirteenth century, under the influence of such great mystics as St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Gertrude and others, there began to develop in the Latin Rite a special devotion to the Wounds of Christ. The cult of the Wound in Christ's side opened the way to the cult of His Heart.

The great apostle of this cult was a nun of the Sisters of the Visitation at the monastery at Paray-Le-Monial in France — Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690) — who was canonized a Saint on the 12th day of May 1920. In the years 1673-1675, this pious nun was visited by our Lord who showed her his wounded Heart and commanded her to spread devotion to his Sacred Heart. Thus the cult of the Sacred Heart of Christ (Jesus) slowly began to develop in the Church. Pope Clement XIII, in the year 1675, permitted certain churches and fraternities to celebrate the feast of the Heart of Jesus, and Pius IX, in 1856, extended this feast to the whole Catholic Church. This feast was celebrated on the Friday following the second Sunday after the Pentecost. On May 25, 1899, Pope Leo XIII consecrated the whole world to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and later, St. Pius X decreed that this consecration be renewed each year.

Pope Leo XIII declared that the veneration of the Heart of Jesus is the best expression of religion. Pius XI, in an encyclical of May 8, 1928 regarding this veneration says: "In that expression of piety is embodied the whole content of religion, hence, this veneration also embodies the rule of a perfect life."

Pope Pius XII in an encyclical dated May 15, 1956, the centennial of the institution of the feast of the Heart of Jesus, gives the dogmatic basis of this cult as derived from Holy Scripture, and from the teaching of the Church Fathers and other liturgical sources. He recommends the veneration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as the best remedy for the maladies of the heart and soul in today's world. "Where are we to seek a remedy," asks the Holy Father, "in the face of so much evil, which today, more than in the past, so greatly afflicts individuals, families, nations and the whole world? Can there be found a better devotion than that to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus...? What can more effectively inspire the faithful Christians to a genuine fulfillment of the commandments of the

Gospel, if not the love of Christ, which the veneration of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus increases and intensifies daily?"

In one of his apparitions to St. Margaret Alacoque, Jesus Christ, pointing to his wounded Heart, said: "Behold this heart, which has loved mankind so much, and which receives only ingratitude and coldness in return for its love. My desire is that you should make reparation to my Heart for this ingratitude, and induce others also to make reparation." Thus, according to the desire of Christ Himself, the purpose of the cult of his Most Sacred Heart was to repay his love with love and to repair the injuries done to him in the Most Holy Sacrament of Love. The following belong to special forms of the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus: the celebration of the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; the celebration of the first Fridays of every month with Communion of reparation, and Holy Hours; the annual renewal of the act of consecration; the consecration of the family to the Sacred Heart of Jesus; the enthronement of the picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in family homes; and in reparation for sin, the perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.



## **The Cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Our Church**

The church services of the Eastern Church are noted for their profound devotion to the Divine Love and Mercy of God. The Wednesday and Friday services are filled with sincere devotion and reverence toward the Cross, toward Christ's sufferings, his wounds, and his pierced side.

Veneration is also paid to the instruments of Christ's passion: the sufferings and afflictions of the heart of the Most holy Mother of God at the sight of her crucified Son are also frequently recalled. In the stichera of Tuesday's Vespers service of the 4th tone, we read: "We extol your sufferings, O Christ Master, — the instruments of your passion: the cross, the lance and reed, the sponge and nails, the scourges, the purple robe and crown of thorns, the spittings and mockings that you voluntarily endured." "You allowed Yourself to be nailed to the cross," we sing in the stichera of Tuesday Vespers service of the 8th tone, "and pierced in the hands and feet and holy side, you poured forth for me the drops of divine salvation, O most Good One..."

The Servant of God Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky, a great authority and lover of the Eastern Rite, frequently speaks of God's love in his pastoral letters. He was so overwhelmed by this love that he did not regard the veneration of God's Love under the form of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus out of harmony with the spirit and practice of our Rite, hence he zealously commended it. At the Archeparchial Synod in Lviv in 1940, he proposed a special decree on the cult of the Love of Jesus. Here, using Scripture as the basis, he described the infinite love of Jesus Christ for us. "The figure of Christ," he says, "as depicted by the Apostles and Evangelists, is so glorious, so sublime, that throughout long centuries, even the efforts of the whole race would be unable to exhaust all knowledge of Him in Whom 'dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily' (Col. 2,9)... The cross, the sacrifice, the most holy wounds in the hands, feet and side, the wounds from the crown of thorns, and the most holy Blood which is so profusely poured out upon the whole world — all these are objects of divine worship."

Metropolitan Andrew takes the cult of the Sacred Heart in a broad sense, understanding it to refer to the whole person of





*"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest." (Mt. 11,28)*

Christ, God-Man. "The real object of the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus," he says in this same decree, "is all that in the human nature of Christ can be embodied in that symbol — even those things which do not flow from the interior feeling of love, such as, for example, his entire doctrine, his wisdom, all of his virtues, prayers, activities, institutions, directives and so on. By employing the term 'the Heart of Jesus' as a symbol of all the rich interior life of Christ, we ascribe it all to his love. All this we worship. In that symbol we have an excellent synthesis and a concrete sign of the infinite treasures of Christ's soul and the inexhaustible source of God's priceless gifts to us."

In the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus the Servant of God, Metropolitan Andrew, saw great advantages for the spiritual life of our people, and consequently commanded it to be cultivated. He said, "In the parish where the faithful venerate Christ the Saviour under that form, or in that manner, the whole spiritual life begins to flourish, people flock to church, the number of those who receive the Holy Eucharist is increased, vices begin slowly to disappear from among the people, concord and love reign in families, parents come to learn what a treasure children are to them, children learn to respect and love their parents. With the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, all things begin to change in the parish — just as when spring arrives, all nature awakens to new life. Hence, it is the unquestionable obligation of every pastor to foster this cult in his family, in other Christian families, and in the whole parish."

Speaking of the celebration of the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in our Church, Metropolitan Andrew notes: "Neither the eparchial authorities nor the Archeparchial Synod is competent to introduce such customs... If, by the grace of God, a Synod of our ecclesiastical province should convene, perhaps it will also approve the practice of celebrating the feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus on the second Sunday following the Descent of the Holy Spirit. Our Archeparchial Synod can only tacitly approve the practice which has existed until now in the monasteries of the Order of St. Basil the Great and in many parochial churches, and not oppose this practice."

The service in honor of the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was composed by our greatest Liturgist, Father Isidore

Dolnysky. "The service composed by the Prelate, Father Dolnysky," says Metropolitan Andrew, "not only complies with all the liturgical prescriptions, but also as regards its content is a very good rendition of the cult of the infinite love of Christ under the symbol of his heart." Father Dolnysky also composed the Akathistos to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is considered the most beautiful hymn of praise in honor of Christ's love.

The Archeparchial Synod of Lviv, in its directives concerning the cult of Christ's Love of December 20, 1940, ordered the priest to read the act of consecration to the Heart of Jesus after the Divine Liturgy every year on the third Sunday following the Descent of the Holy Spirit, and gives a formula of the consecration. The Synod approved the practice of the Apostleship of Prayer venerating the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It strongly recommended that priests encourage the faithful to practice the Communion of reparation and to introduce everywhere the Apostleship of Prayer. The Synod consecrated the entire Archeparchy of Lviv to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and prescribed that the priests consecrate themselves, their families, their parish and all Ukraine to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. (63-69)

The feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was adopted by the Syrian, Maronite, Chaldean, Armenian, Melchite, and Italo-Greek Catholics of the Eastern Church. The revision of our liturgical books conducted by the Holy See in the 1940's retained the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in our breviary under the name "The Feast of the Most Sweet Lord and God our Saviour Jesus Christ, Lover of Mankind."

In his promises given to St. Margaret Alacoque, Jesus Christ promised the venerators of his Sacred Heart the necessary graces for their state of life; peace in their families; consolation in their pains and trials; assured refuge in life, and especially the grace of a happy death. Millions of souls throughout the world have found peace and happiness, growth in love, and the practice of Christian virtues in the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

A characteristic mark of love is to sacrifice oneself for the beloved and strive to repay love for love. Such was the love of our Saviour: "We love God, for he has first loved us," says St. John in his first letter. (4,19)

In the encyclical of June 28, 1889 — where he encourages



all to embrace the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Pope Leo XIII writes: “The most fervent desire of our Saviour is to see the fire of love with which his heart burns being born and growing in the souls of the faithful. Therefore, let us go to him for he asks of us nothing more than that we repay him love for love.”





## Part II



## **The Feast of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God**

The Church does not have the custom of celebrating the earthly birthday of the Saints of God, but rather celebrates their heavenly birthday, that is, the day of their death which, for them, is the beginning of eternal life. She does make exception, however, for the two greatest Saints in the Church — the most Pure Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist. We celebrate not only their heavenly birth, but also their birth on earth.

One of the great feasts we celebrate at the beginning of the Liturgical Year is the feast of the Nativity of the most Holy Mother of God (Theotokos). As is evident from the words of the troparion of this festival, it is a joyful and significant feast. It is joyful because it is the birthday of the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven and earth. It is significant because it places before our eyes the great truth of our holy faith concerning the Divine Motherhood of the most Pure Virgin Mary, from whom "shone forth the Sun of Justice, Christ our God." The morning star has risen, therefore, the rising of the sun is not far off. The sublime name of the feast given in our liturgical books also indicates the great significance of this feast: "The

Nativity of our most Holy Queen, the Mother of God and ever-Virgin Mary”.

What is the basis for the institution of this feast? What is its history and its significance?

### **The Institution of this Feast**

The Gospel records very few incidents in the life of the most Pure Virgin Mary. It says nothing about her nativity, her parentage, her childhood or youth, or her holy assumption into heaven. What is the source of our information about all these things? All this information comes from the tradition of the Church and the apocryphal writings. The Apocrypha are those writings which relate certain events from the life of Jesus Christ or his most Holy Mother that are not included in the Holy Gospel. Although the Church does not acknowledge the Apocrypha as authentic writings nor as trustworthy historical sources, nevertheless, much of what they relate belongs to the authentic tradition and belief of the primitive Church.

The chief source of information on the life of the most Holy Mother of God is the Apocryphal book written around the year 170-180 called the *Proto-evangelium of James*. This book presented the basis for the institution of such feasts as the Conception of St. Anna, the Nativity of the most Holy Mother of God, the Presentation in the Temple, and the feasts honoring Joachim and Anna, the parents of Mary. From this book we learn of the circumstances surrounding the birth of the Virgin Mary, and the names of her parents, Joachim and Anna.

The apocryphal Proto-evangelium of James in ancient times was held in high esteem. Among the many Fathers who cite or explain it are St. Epiphany, St. Andrew of Crete, St. Sophronius, Patriarch Germanus I, St. John Damascene and Patriarch Photius.

In the Proto-evangelium of James we learn that the most Pure Virgin Mary was descended on her father's side from the royal house of David, and on her mother's side from the priestly line of Aaron. Her parents lived in Nazareth and were fairly well-off. They were also distinguished for the great holiness of their lives and their great love of God and neighbor. Joachim was accustomed to dividing the fruits of his

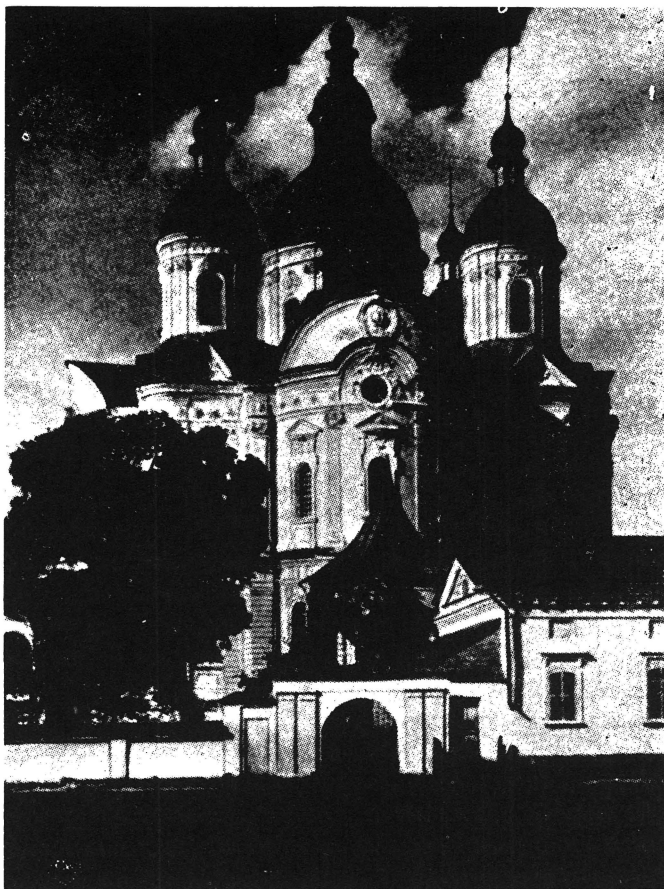
labor into three parts: one part he gave to God as a sacrifice, the second part he distributed among the poor, and the third part he kept for himself. Their one great sorrow was that they had no children. Among the Jews, childlessness was looked upon not only as an absence of God's blessing, but as a punishment from God. Because of their childlessness, Joachim and Anna had to suffer much. Therefore, it is not surprising that they should unceasingly implore God for a child. This was the main purpose of all their prayers, fastings, and alms. Finally, the Lord God blessed them in their old age with a child who was destined to become the Mother of God.

### **The History of the Feast**

The feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God in the Eastern Church is one of the most ancient Marian feasts; so ancient, that the time of its appearance cannot be accurately determined. St. John Chrysostom, St. Proclus, St. Epiphany, St. Augustine and St. Roman the Melodist mention it. A tradition in Palestine recounts that St. Helena (†330), mother of the Emperor Constantine, built a church in Jerusalem honoring the feast of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God. The Sacramentary of Pope Gelasius (492-496) of the fifth century also mentions this feast.

The Patriarch Anatole (449-458), Stephan of Jerusalem (6c), St. Andrew of Crete, the Patriarch Sergius (7c), St. John Damascene, the Patriarch Germanus (8c), and St. Joseph the Studite (9c) all composed sticheras and hymns in honor of this feast. The official introduction of this feast in the Byzantine empire is ascribed to the Emperor Mauricius (582-602).

From the East, the festival of the Nativity of the Mother of God found its way to the West, spreading first to Rome in the seventh century and then, in later centuries, throughout the entire Latin Church. The 8th day of September was selected as the day of this feast because on that day nine months were completed from December 9, the day on which the church celebrates the conception of the Most Pure Virgin Mary in the womb of Anna. This day was also selected because it marked the day on which a church in Jerusalem was consecrated in her honor. This feast ranks as one of the twelve major feasts in our Liturgical Year. It has a one day pre-feast and a post-feast



*The Cathedral of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God  
in Chernihiv (1752-64)*

lasting only four days because the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross is celebrated on September 14.

### **The Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God — A Day of Universal Joy**

The birth of Mary, who was to become the Mother of God, was a singular source of joy for her parents — Joachim and Anna, for heaven, for earth, and for all creation. The spiritual joy occasioned by this feast of the Nativity of the Mother of

God has been stressed by various Fathers of the Church. St. Andrew of Crete, in his longer sermon on this feast, extols the Most Holy Mother of God as the one in whom all the prophecies and prefigurements of the Old Testament were fulfilled. Fittingly, extolling her with the most sublime titles of praise, he summons all to share in this joy — heaven, earth, the sea and every creature; finally, he concludes with the words: “For today a child is born, from whom we have received salvation, Christ God and Word, who, having come, abides with us forever.” St. John Damascene in a sermon for this day says: “The day of the Nativity of the Mother of God is a day of universal joy for, through the Mother of God, the entire human race was renewed and the sorrow of the first mother, Eve, was transformed into joy.”

The divine services of this day are filled with joyful melodies, almost as though we were celebrating the Nativity of our Lord or his glorious Resurrection. The principal motives underlying this joy are the end of the childlessness of the holy Joachim and Anna, the beginning of our salvation, the most wonderful dignity of Divine Motherhood bestowed on Mary, the unique role and significance of the Mother of God in the work of the redemption of the human race.

The first to rejoice at Mary’s Nativity are her parents. In the sticheras of the Aposticha in the Small Vespers service, the Church cries out to them: “Rejoice, O Joachim and Anna, rejoice, for from a barren woman is born the Cause of our joy and salvation.”

The angels and all the faithful also rejoice at Mary’s Nativity: “To Your honorable Nativity, O Most Holy and Pure Virgin,” we sing in the Small Vespers service in the sticheras at Psalm 137, “The multitude of angels in heaven and the human race on earth are singing praises, for you became the Mother of the Creator of all, Jesus our God. While imploring Him, do not cease praying for us, who after God place our hope in you, O Mother of God, ever praised and Immaculate.”

All the Saints of both the Old and the New Testaments share in this joy: “Renew yourself, O Adam,” says the Exapostilarion of the Matins service, “be happy, O Eve, rejoice you prophets together with the Apostles and the righteous, for today the universal joy of the angels and men has shone forth from the righteous Joachim and Anna: The Mother of God, Mary.”



Finally, the Church calls upon the faithful to pay due veneration to the Mother of God: "Come, all you faithful, let us hasten to the Virgin, for she is born, who even before her conception was destined to be the Mother of our God. She is the vessel of virginity, flowering rod of Aaron from the stem of Jesse, proclaimed by the prophets, and the child of Joachim and Anna. She is born; and through her the world is renewed, and the church is clothed in splendor. She is the holy temple, where God abides, a virgin vessel, a royal chamber, in which the wondrous mystery of the marvelous union of the two natures of Christ is accomplished. By paying worship to him let us praise the All Pure Virgin."

### **The Cult of the Saints Joachim and Anna**

The day following the feast of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God, the Church honors the memory of the "Holy and Righteous Ancestors of Christ, Joachim and Anna". The Church pays them special veneration as the parents of Mary and the ancestors of Jesus Christ. Hence, in our service they are called "Ancestors of God" (Greek = Theopater). In the dismissal prayer of the church services, we daily ask their prayerful intercession.

During the services in their honor, the Church rejoices at their feast, praising their role in relation to our salvation, and extolling them as the most blessed of parents. "Come today, O lovers of the feast," we sing in the sticheras of the Vespers services of the 9th of September, "let us rejoice, singing, and let us zealously honor the memory of Joachim and Anna, honorable couple, because for us they gave birth to the Mother of God, the Virgin most pure... O Blessed couple, you surpassed all parents, for you gave birth to the most beautiful of all creatures! Truly, you are blessed, O Joachim, being the father of such a Virgin! And blessed is your womb, O Anna, for you brought forth the Mother of our life. Blessed is she who nursed Her, that she in turn might nourish Him, the Nourisher of all creatures. Therefore, we implore you, O Blessed ones, pray to Him for the salvation of our souls."

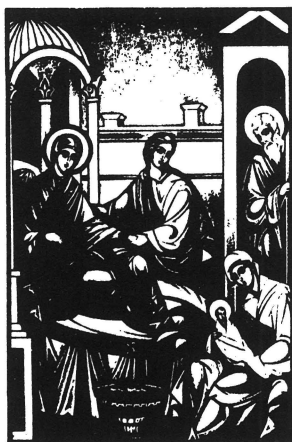
The veneration of the righteous Joachim and Anna began to take root quite rapidly after the institution of the feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God. In the sixth century churches began to be erected in honor of St. Anna. Emperor

Justinian I (527-565) in the year 550, dedicated a church in Constantinople in her honor. In that same century, a church was erected in her honor in Jerusalem, the place of her birth. These two churches had a great influence on the spread of the cult of both the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary, but especially of St. Anna. The Eastern Church began to celebrate their memory on the 9th of September toward the close of the sixth century. Ancient Greek hymns also exist in their honor, and in the writings of the Fathers, especially those of St. Epiphany and St. John Damascene, we find words of praise in honor of St. Anna.

Under the influence of the East, the cult of St. Anna developed in the eighth century also in the West, particularly in Rome, and it was not until the fourteenth century that this devotion spread throughout Europe. The Latin Church celebrates the memory of St. Anna on the 26th of July, and the memory of St. Joachim on the 16th of August.

In our Church Calendar, in addition to the commemoration of the Saints Joachim and Anna on the 9th of September, we have two more feastdays in honor of St. Anna: the 9th of December, the day she conceived the Most Pure Virgin Mary, and the 25th of July — the day of her death.”

Christian iconography has also expressed great devotion to the parents of the Blessed Mother of God. Quite frequently an icon will depict St. Anna with the child Mary upon her knees, or both parents will be portrayed bringing the little Mary to the temple to consecrate her to the service of God.



# **The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross**

*“We extol you, O Lifegiver Christ, and  
honor your venerable Cross, by which  
you saved us from the slavery of the  
enemy.” (Hymn of Praise in the Matins  
Service of the Feast)*

“The veneration of the Holy Cross of the Lord,” — says the Servant of God Andrew Sheptytsky in his pastoral letter on the Holy Cross — “is one of the most significant aspects of the worship of the God-Man... Signing ourselves with the sign of the Cross is one of the oldest customs of Christians.”

The Holy Cross is an ever living symbol of God's everlasting love toward us sinners, a symbol of Christ's total self-sacrifice, a symbol of our redemption and salvation, a symbol of Christ's victory over death and Satan. By venerating the holy Cross we honor Christ's sacrifice, passion and death. Whenever we sign ourselves with the sign of the holy Cross, we profess our faith in our Saviour.

The Eastern Church holds the veneration of the holy Cross in such high regard it has dedicated several feasts during the year to its honor. The greatest of these is the feast of the “Universal Elevation of the Venerable and Life-giving Cross”. Let us consider the history of its institution and the various rites connected with it.

## **History of the Institution of the Feast**

The feast of the Elevation of the Venerable Cross is a very ancient feast. However, like the history of the finding of the holy Cross of the Lord, the history of the institution of the feast has been obscured by various legends and it is not easy to separate historical fact from pious legend.

One must remember that in celebrating this feast, we are not concerned with the ordinary veneration of the holy Cross, which takes place on the third Sunday of the Great Fast, but with that aspect of the feast which is expressed in the name of the feast itself — EXALTATION or ELEVATION — of the Cross, that is, a special solemn rite connected with the veneration and glorification of the holy Cross.

Historians of the Eastern Church generally agree that two particular events gave rise to the institution of this feast: the finding of the holy Cross of the Lord in the fourth century and its recovery or return from Persian captivity in the seventh century.

The institution of the Feast of the Exaltation was first preceded by the discovery or the finding of the sacred wood of the Cross upon which Christ died. Christian tradition has transmitted to us several different legends about the finding of the holy Cross, three of which are attributed to St. Helena (†330), the mother of Emperor Constantine the Great. The finding of the holy Cross is believed to have taken place in 326.

Historians who mention the finding of the holy Cross say nothing about its first exaltation immediately after its discovery, nor does pious tradition give any account of it. The Greek Church celebrates the finding of the holy Cross on the 6th of March. In the Prologue, this church feast has the title: "The Finding of the Venerable Cross which was discovered by Blessed Helena". The Latin Church celebrated this event on the 3rd of May, but after the reform of the feastdays during the reign of Pope John XXIII in 1960, this festival was excluded from the Church Calendar.

The feast of the Exaltation owes its origin to the consecration of the Church of the Resurrection of the Lord, which was erected on Golgotha, in Jerusalem, by Emperor Constantine the Great. This consecration was celebrated very solemnly during the time of Macarius, Bishop of Jerusalem, on the 13th of September in the year 335. On the day following the consecration, the solemn exaltation or elevation of the sacred wood of the Cross took place. During its elevation the people exclaimed "Lord, have mercy" many times. Since that time, the Eastern Church each year has celebrated the consecration of the Church of the Resurrection of our Lord on the 13th of

September, and the feast of the Exaltation of the Venerable Cross on the 14th of September.

The second important event, which rendered the feast universal in the East as well as in the West, was the return or recovery of the sacred wood of the Cross from Persian captivity. The Persian King Chosroes in 614 had captured Jerusalem and had carried off the Lord's Cross to his capitol in Ctesiphon. Fourteen years later, the Emperor Heraclius (610-641), after his victory over the Persians, recovered the sacred Cross and had it brought back to Jerusalem where, on the 14th of September, a second solemn celebration of the exaltation of the holy Cross took place. From that time on, the feast bore the name "The Universal Exaltation (Elevation) of the Venerable and Life-giving Cross". Since the feast of the Exaltation called to mind the crucifixion and death of Christ and was given equal rank with Good or Great Friday, it had become a custom of the Church, from the earliest times, to observe a strict fast on this day.

The feast of the Exaltation is one of the twelve great feasts of our Church and has a one day pre-feast and a seven day post-feast. The Saturday and Sunday before and after the Exaltation, carry the name of "The Saturday and The Sunday before — or after the feast of the Exaltation", because on those days the Epistle and Gospel speak of the holy Cross.

Besides the feast of the Exaltation, our Church also pays honor to the sacred Cross on the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross. On this day, as on the feast of the Exaltation, the holy Cross is carried out during the matins service and veneration is paid to it, but without the rite of exaltation, i.e., elevation (being raised up), a rite which is only carried out on the feast of the Exaltation.

On the 7th of May the Eastern Church commemorates the "Apparition of the Sign of the Venerable Cross in the sky in Jerusalem". At the time of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, during the season of the Pentecost in the year 351, the holy Cross appeared in the heavens, extending from Golgotha to the Mount of Olives.

In our Church Calendar, we have still another feast celebrated on the 1st of August, the feast of the "Procession or March with the Sacred Wood of the Cross." That means, there was a procession with a piece of the wood of the Cross which on that day was carried from the royal palace in Con-

stantinople to the Church of St. Sophia. Here special veneration was given to the holy Cross, similar to the reverence paid it on the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross. Beginning on the first of August, every day for two weeks the sacred wood of the Cross was carried throughout the city, while God was asked to bless it and to avert all sicknesses. This feast was instituted in Constantinople in the ninth century on account of the various sicknesses and epidemics which usually occurred in the month of August.

### **The Rite of Exaltation or Elevation of the Holy Cross**

A peculiar trait of the feast of the Exaltation is the solemn public veneration of the holy Cross by a separate rite of elevation during the Matins service. In the course of the ages, the Eastern Church developed various rites for the elevation of the holy Cross. Here we mention a few of these and their more significant aspects.

#### **1. The Rite of St. Athanasius at Mount Athos**

This rite is recorded in the Book of Epistles of the tenth-eleventh century of this Lavra. It is very simple. The patriarch standing on the ambon (at that time the ambons stood in the middle of the church) raised the holy Cross while the people sang "Lord, have mercy." After that five troparions were read: "Save your people, O Lord..."; "The Life-giving Cross of your goodness..." which is the troparion of the pre-feast; "No sooner had the wood of Your Cross been set up..." and "Today the word of the prophet is fulfilled..." — both troparions from the Sessional Hymns in the Matins service of the feast; and the Kontakion "Willingly raised upon the Cross, O Christ..."

#### **2. The Rite performed at Mount Sinai**

This rite is found in the Sinai Kanonarion of the tenth century and was performed in the following manner: At the beginning, the above mentioned troparions are taken. Afterwards, the archbishop ascends the ambon, takes the holy Cross, turns to the East, makes the sign of the cross with it three times and silently executes the first elevation by slowly raising the holy Cross above his head starting from his breast.

While he is raising the holy Cross, the people sing "Lord, have mercy" fifty times, and as many times as he lowers the holy Cross. In the same manner the second elevation is performed facing the south, the third facing the west, and the fourth facing the north. At each elevation the people sing altogether one hundred times "Lord, have mercy." After the last elevation, a bow is made before the holy Cross while the kontakion of the feast "Willingly raised upon the Cross..." is being sung.



### **3. The Rite of Elevation at Constantinople**

This rite is given in the Constantinopolitan Typicon of the Evergetes Monastery from the twelfth century, and is similar to the Sinai rite with the exception that, before the elevation, only the troparion "O Lord, save your people..." was sung. The Patriarch raised the holy Cross not four times but five times, that is toward the four corners of the world, and at the fifth time again toward the East. At each elevation "Lord, have mercy" was sung.

### **4. Rite of Elevation in our Native Land Rus-Ukraine**

This rite was already mentioned in the thirteenth century in the documents of our Church. In ancient times the elevation of the holy Cross took place only in the cathedrals where there was a bishop and many priests. The Patriarchal Synod of

1276 permitted this rite to be performed in all the churches. Metropolitan Cyprian (1381-1382 and 1390-1406) in his "Instructions for the clergy of Rus" writes: "As regards the elevation of the Venerable Cross, the Cross is raised for glory of the venerable and life-giving Cross" in every church throughout the land where Christians live, even though there is only one priest.

Our documents of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries give a description of the rite of exaltation or elevation. The carrying out of the holy Cross during the Great Doxology in the Matins service and the petitions of the Fervent Ektenia during the elevation — are the same as today. There were five elevations at each side of the tetrapod, and the last elevation was made again toward the East. During each elevation the people sang "Lord, have mercy" one hundred times. The rite ended with a bow and the kissing of the holy Cross while the kontakion "Willingly raised upon the Cross..." and the threefold "O Lord, we honor your Cross, and glorify your holy Resurrection" were sung.

Father I. Dolnytsky's Typicon gives the rite of elevation according to the tradition of our Church with only this difference — that in Galicia (Western Ukraine), at each elevation of the holy Cross, they sang "Lord, have mercy" not one hundred times but twenty-four times.

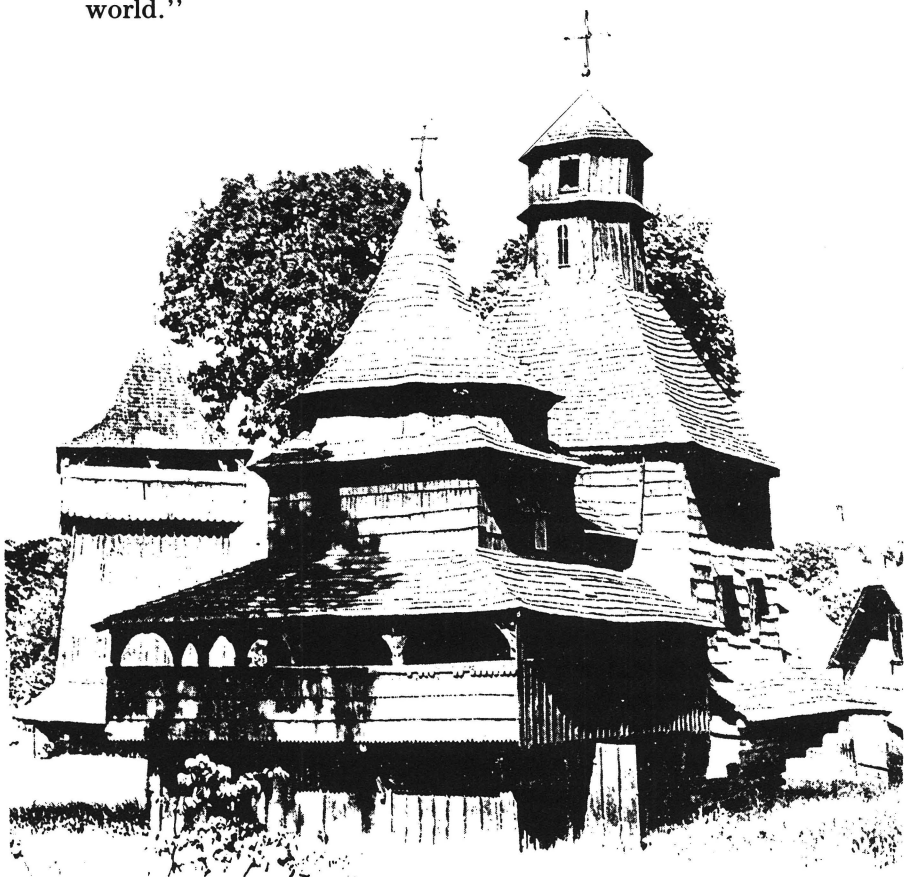
The service of the feast of the Exaltation or Elevation of the Venerable Cross is, strictly speaking, one glorious hymn in honor of the Cross. Here the holy Cross is continuously praised and glorified as the sign of victory, power and salvation: "Hail, O life-giving Cross," exclaims the stichera at the Aposticha in the Vespers service of the feast, "invincible victory of religion, gate to paradise, fortress of the faithful, defence of the Church. Through you, corruption is utterly destroyed, the power of death is swallowed up, and we are raised up from earth to heaven. You are an invincible weapon, subjugator of demons, glory of the Martyrs, true ornament of the Saints, the refuge of salvation, — grant the world great mercy."

The feast of the Exaltation, by placing the holy Cross before our eyes, reminds us of our obligation to venerate, love and confess the holy Cross. "Do not be ashamed of the Cross of Christ," admonishes St. Cyril of Jerusalem in his fourth catechesis, "even if some hide it, nevertheless, you trace it



clearly upon your forehead so that the demons, seeing the royal sign, may tremble and flee far away. Make this sign when you eat and drink, when you sit, lie down, rise or walk, in a word, at every occasion."

St. John Chrysostom, in a sermon on the Cemetery and the Cross, speaks of the significance of the Cross for us: "The Cross is a trophy against the demons, a weapon against sin, a sword with which Christ pierced the serpent. The Cross is the will of the Father, the glory of the Only-begotten One, joy of the Spirit, ornament of the angels, fortress of the Church, the glory of Paul, stronghold of the Saints, the light of the whole world."



*Wooden Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (1636),  
Drohobych, Ukraine*

# **The Feast of the Patronage of the Most Holy Mother of God**

*“We sing your praises, O Most Holy  
Virgin, Mother of Christ our God,  
and we glorify your all-glorious  
patronage.” (Hymn of Praise from  
the Sixteenth Century)*

Among the Marian feasts listed in our Liturgical Year, the feast of the Patronage of the Most Holy Mother of God deserves special consideration. The cult of the Mother of God as the Protectress of our nation reaches like a golden thread from the times of the Kievan princes to the present day. The secret of honoring the Mother of God as a Protectress lies, perhaps, in the fact that we are dealing here not with human but with heavenly and more powerful intercession. Every person, family and nation would like to enjoy such an intercession and protection. From the very beginning of our Kievan State, we have had great and powerful enemies. It is small wonder then that our people sought the assistance and protection of the Most Holy Mother of God whose intercession is all-powerful. For our people, then, the feast of the Patronage has always been, and still remains, a day of great manifestation of love and gratitude to the Most Holy Mother of God, a day of joyous praise and glorification of her protection and intercession.

## **The Institution of the Feast of Patronage**

The chief motive that led to the institution of this feast was a vision granted to St. Andrew, the Fool for Christ, when the Saracens besieged the capital of Constantinople. The peo-



*The Church of the Patronage of the Most Holy Mother of God (1766)*

ple, terror-stricken, gathered in the church of the Most Holy Mother of God at Blachernae where her mantle was preserved, and there they held an all-night prayer vigil. The greatly distressed people filled the church to overflowing. Among the gathering were St. Andrew and his disciple, Epiphany, both of whom also prayed for the protection of the city. After the service, St. Andrew saw the Most Holy Mother of God in radiant light as she was approaching from the royal doors (a name the Greeks gave to the main doors of the church) in the company of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Theologian and amid the singing of a great choir of Saints. The Mother of God proceeded toward the altar where she knelt down and prayed

long, shedding tears. Afterwards she arose, removed from her head a luminous veil, and stretched it out wide over the people in church. Then she disappeared. St. Andrew and his disciple, Epiphany, saw the vision and understood that the Mother of God came to rescue the city. News of the miracle spread throughout the whole city like a flash of lightning. The enemy retreated and the city was saved.

From this veil, which in Ukrainian is called "pokrov", the feast got its name: "Pokrov Presvyatoyi Bohorodytsi" (The Veil (or Protection) of the Most Holy Mother of God). The veil became the symbol of the protection and intercession of the Blessed Virgin.

Who was St. Andrew the Fool? Historians generally agree that he was a Slav from the southern part of Rus-Ukraine. He, together with other slaves, was brought to Constantinople where he became the slave of a wealthy lord. Here he learned and loved the Christian faith. Meditating on the words of St. Paul: "We are fools for Christ, but you are wise in Christ" (I Cor. 4,10), he began to act like a fool, hence, his name. Having gained his freedom from his master, he spent much time in prayer and the reading of Holy Scriptures.

At what period of time did St. Andrew live and when did the miracle of protection take place? It is difficult to give a clear and adequate answer to this question. The opinions of the historians in regard to this question are divided. Some say that St. Andrew lived during the reign of Leo I, the Great (457-474), that is, in the fifth century, while others, who represent the majority, place the time of his existence during the reign of Emperor Leo VI, the Wise, (886-911), that is, at the beginning of the tenth century.

The feast of the Patronage was a local feast among the Greeks, which they ceased to celebrate after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. No one knows precisely why October first became the day of the feast. Probably because St. Andrew had the vision on that day, or perhaps because, as some think, on that day the Eastern Church celebrates the memory of St. Roman the Melodist, who composed many hymns in honor of the Most Pure Virgin Mary. On the day following the feast, the Church commemorates St. Andrew the Fool.

The feast of the Patronage enjoys a service similar to that of the great feasts with an all-night vigil, but is not one of the twelve great feasts, and has neither a pre-feast nor a post-

feast. The Synod of Lviv. 1891, in reducing the number of the feasts, ordered this feast to be transferred to Sunday.

### **The Feast of the Patronage in Ukraine**

In her services the Eastern Church fondly emphasizes the three most beautiful privileges of the Mother of God: the Divine Maternity, Perpetual Virginity and her Intercession for us before God. The latter privilege, above all, won the hearts of our people. Our princes, kings, armies, our Kozaks and Hetmans gladly chose the Most Pure Mother of God as their Protectress and Guardian. Here we shall mention some examples.

Prince Jaroslaw Mudry (The Wise), in 1036, defeated the nomadic Pechenegs and out of gratitude to God and His Most Holy Mother, he built the beautiful Cathedral of St. Sophia in Kiev and erected the Church of the Annunciation of our Blessed Mother on the Golden Gates.

In 1037, in the church of the Annunciation, he placed the whole nation under the protection or patronage of the Mother of God. Thus, by the will of our monarch, the Most Holy Mother of God was proclaimed officially the Patroness, Defender and Queen of our nation.

In hard times our princes and their armies would hasten to Her for assistance. The Grand Prince Mstyslaw who ruled in Tmutorokan, at a battle with the Cherkasses promised to build a church in honor of the Mother of God, if she assisted him in defeating the enemy. He defeated the enemy and gladly kept his promise.

The Grand Prince Volodymyr Monomakh, in his memoirs, claimed that he owed his victory over the Polovtsians to God and the Most Pure Virgin Mary. He even composed a special prayer in her honor. Our princes and their armies, when marching against the Polovtsians in 1103, turned to God and to the Blessed Virgin for assistance, and utterly defeated the Polovtsians. Prince Ihor Sviatoslavych, the hero of the heroic epic "Song of Ihor's Campaign", after his escape from captivity, went to pay homage to the miraculous icon of the Mother of God in Pyrohoscha, to thank her for her assistance in his escape. The Galician King, Danylo, after a successful campaign against Bohemia, placed expensive gifts at her feet.

Some of our princes used icons of the Mother of God or prayers in her honor on their seals. In recent times in Ukraine

very ancient gold, bronze and copper necklaces of icons were discovered, called "enkolpions" in Greek (round or oval medallions suspended from the neck, bearing a representation of our Lord or our Blessed Mother). One such enkolpion has the Greek inscription on it reading: "O Mother of God, be my Protection and Defense, amen."

Our renowned Zaporozhian Kozaks built a church in honor of the Patronage of the Most Holy Mother of God with an icon representing her Patronage at the Sich, the center of Kozak power. Above the icon of the Blessed Mother were written the words: "I shall deliver and protect my people", and from the Zaporozhians, represented below the icon, there is a ribbon reaching up to the Mother of God with the inscription on it: "We implore you, cover us with your holy veil (omophor) and deliver us from all evil." Before they began their campaigns against the enemy, the Kozaks assisted at the Moleben service in honor of their Protectress and fervently sang: "Under your patronage we fly, O Virgin Mother of God; do not despise our prayers in our afflictions, but deliver us from our miseries, you who alone are pure and blessed." After returning home safely, they would hasten to her in sincere gratitude. In their battle hymn: "Come now, Boys, to Arms!" they sang the words: "St. George will help us to rout the Turk and so will the Most Pure Mother."

Following the example of their leaders, our people have cultivated a sincere devotion to the Mother of God as their Guardian, Protectress and Intercessor. They always turned to her with great confidence, invoking her help whether in their personal or family troubles or whether in times of national crisis. Her holy icon is found in every Ukrainian home. The history of our nation has recorded many miracles that are attributed to the aid of the Mother of God, especially during times of enemy invasion of our land.

Who does not know about the miraculous protection of the Pochaiw monastery during the Turkish siege in July of 1675? In response to the fervent prayers of the monks and the faithful, the Mother of God appeared over the monastery church and with her omophor (veil), she protected the monastery. That miraculous event was immortalized by the Ukrainian song in honor of the Mother of God: "The evening star appeared and stood over Pochaiw".

Among the Ukrainian people, the veneration of the Bles-



*Cathedral of the Patronage of the Most Holy Mother of God,  
Kharkiv, Ukraine (1689)*

sed Mother of God as Intercessor and Protectress is best illustrated in the village chronicle of Yazhiw Staryj in Western Ukraine. Recalling the frightful incursions of the Tartar hordes and the heavenly protection of the Most Blessed Mary, he writes: "The people, terrified and impoverished, fled to their small church, threw themselves down on their knees before the icon of the Mother of God, and prayed fervently that they would always be given protection."

## **The Spirit of the Service of the Feast of the Patronage of the Mother of God**

The service of this feast reflects the hundreds of years of deep faith of the Eastern Church and of the faith of our people in the intercession and protection of the Most Holy Mother of God.

In the sticheras of the Small vespers service, the Church calls upon all the faithful to celebrate the feast of the Patronage: "Come, all you lovers of the feast, and let us praise the venerable protection of the Mother of God. For she stretched forth her Hands imploringly to her Son, and the world fell under Her protection. Therefore, let us celebrate gloriously with our lips and hearts, with spiritual songs and melodies, together with all lovers of the feast."

In the sticheras of Vespers and Matins services, in the troparion and canon, holy Church pours forth and expresses her childlike love, her unreserved trust in Mary's powerful protection and immediate help, her role in our salvation and her very great maternal mercy: "O Most Pure Mother of God," — we sing in the first stichera of the Great or Solemn Vespers service — "You are a great Intercessor for those in sorrow. You are swift help, salvation and strength of the world. You are the depth of mercy, the fount of divine wisdom, and the protectress of the world. Let us, the faithful, extol and glorify her unspeakable and glorious patronage. Hail, Rejoice, O Full of grace, the Lord is with you, grant the world great mercy."

In the Sessional Hymn at the third Ode of the canon we read: "Zealous and invincible Advocate, sure and infallible hope, bulwark, protection and refuge of those who have recourse to you, O ever-Virgin Pure, together with the angels implore your Son and God to give the world peace, salvation and great mercy."

The troparion of the ninth Ode of the canon praises Mary's privilege of curing the sicknesses of soul and body and of delivering from misfortune: "As the Mother of God, you received from God the gift of healing the ills of all Christians; of delivering them from misfortune; of releasing them from sin and of saving them from captivity and all necessity. Therefore, do not despise us either, O Lady, for you know what we need: health of body and salvation of soul."

In 1912, St. Pope Pius X remarked to our Bishop Mykyta



Budka: "Your nation cannot perish, for it has two guarantees: your nation loves the Eucharistic Christ and the Most Pure Virgin Mary. With these guarantees the nation cannot perish."

Yes, we believe firmly, that the fervent devotion our nation has toward the Most Pure Mother of God as its Protectress and Advocate is the greatest guarantee that she will never abandon our nation, but will intercede in its behalf before her Son and implore from Him that very great grace that the kingdom of darkness and slavery will fall in our native land and that the kingdom of her God-Son will reign once more. Then again, as in the past, our people shall flock to her altars in the hundreds and thousands to pay her veneration as their faithful and untiring Advocate, Guardian and Queen.



## Feast of the Great Martyr St. Demetrius

*“Come all you faithful, having assembled,  
let us praise the fighter of Christ and  
courageous luminary Demetrius.”*  
(Stichera in the Small Vespers Service)

St. Clement of Alexandria describes the greatness and significance of a martyr in these words: “A martyr gives a threefold witness — first, to himself, that he remained faithful to God by his true loyalty to the faith; secondly, against his enemy, who attacked him in vain because he was unshakeable in love; and thirdly, to the Lord, whose teaching is so powerful that even the fear of death cannot prevail against it.

Holy Church from the first centuries of Christianity held, and still holds, the merits of the martyrs in high esteem. She venerates them, and places them before us as examples of the heroic love of God and of unwavering profession of holy faith. Some of these who have in a singular manner distinguished themselves by their zeal and fortitude in professing the holy faith, and by the miracles worked through their intercession are remembered after death by their own solemn feasts during the Church Year. One of these is the Martyr, St. Demetrius, upon whom the Church bestowed the title of Great Martyr and Myroblyte (Myrrh-exuding One because, from his relics, myrrh was said to have exuded). His memory is kept by the Eastern Church on the 26th of October, and by the Western Church on the 8th of October.

### Martyrdom and Glory of St. Demetrius

St. Demetrius lived in the second half of the third century in the city of Salonika (from the Greek name Thessalonica), where his father was a high imperial official. After the death



*St. Demetrius (12th c.)*

of his father, Emperor Maximian made him the proconsul of Salonika. From childhood, St. Demetrius was brought up in the Christian faith. Although he occupied a high office, he professed his faith openly. For this reason, the Emperor Maximian ordered him to be cast into prison. While in prison, he blessed his companion Nestor for battle against the emperor's champion gladiator, Lius. Holding the Cross in his hand, St. Nestor confronted Lius, overcame, and killed him. The emperor, having heard that Demetrius had blessed Nestor before his combat with Lius, sent soldiers to the prison where

they speared Demetrius to death. This occurred in the year 306. The Eastern Church celebrates the memory of St. Nestor on the day following the feast of St. Demetrius.

The Lord glorified the heroic faith of St. Demetrius not only by numerous miracles after his death, but also by preserving his body incorrupt and letting fragrant myrrh exude from his relics. When, about a hundred years after his death, his tomb was opened, his body was found to be incorrupt, and the sick were cured by the fragrant oil which dripped from his bones.

### **The Cult of the Great Martyr Demetrius**

The gift of miracles, the preservation of his body from corruption, and the exuding of myrrh-oil from his body became the basis for a widespread cult of St. Demetrius, not only in Greece, but also among the Slavs. Pilgrims from everywhere flocked in hundreds and thousands to his tomb, looking upon him as an unfailing helper in all their necessities. Because he blessed Nestor before combat, he is regarded as the patron of soldiers. In the fifth century a magnificent church was erected over his tomb. The extent to which this cult spread among the Slavs is evident from the fact that in the Balkan countries there are more than 200 churches dedicated to St. Demetrius.

The cult of St. Demetrius found its way into our native land along with Christianity. Father Andrew Truch, O.S.B.M., in his "Lives of the Saints" writes of this cult: "In Rus-Ukraine, the Martyr St. Demetrius enjoyed great popularity. What gave occasion to this great honor shown to St. Demetrius was the siege of Constantinople by the Ukrainian Prince, Oleh. The Cronicler, Nestor, mentions that when the Rus' armies broke through the Greek forces, "the Greeks were terrified and said: it is not Oleh, but St. Demetrius who was sent against us by God." Later when the Christian faith spread among our people, the princes and their armies and all the faithful entrusted themselves to the protection of St. Demetrius." (Vol. 4, p. 106)

Prince Iziaslav Dymytrij Yaroslavych founded a monastery in Kiev around 1057 and dedicated it to the memory of St. Demetrius. In 1197, the Grand Prince Vsevolod Dymytrij Yuriyevych (†1212) had received a shirt of St.

Demetrius and a board from his coffin as a gift from Salonika. The sick were cured by the oil which seeped from the board. This Prince built at the prince's Court in Volodymyr, a magnificent church dedicated to St. Demetrius, where these relics were preserved. In our native land there were numerous churches dedicated to his name.

The feast of St. Demetrius belongs to the middle class of feasts which are solemn, but not obligatory. Associated with this feast is the memory of an earthquake which occurred in Constantinople on the 26th of October, 740. In the service of that day, holy Church places before the eyes of the faithful his heroic faith and various virtues. She presents him as a brave soldier of Christ and confessor, a miracle-worker who heals the sicknesses of body and soul, and one who helps in all necessities: "O Martyr St. Demetrius," we sing in the sticheras in Vespers, "your miracles shine upon the world like the sun. Therefore, all of us are filled with joy at the memory of your miracles, O Blessed One..." And in the fifth Ode of the canon in the Matins service, we read: "Those who sincerely hasten to your Church with faith, O Demetrius, are quickly delivered from sickness and spiritual sufferings."

St. Demetrius intercedes with God for us: "Today we are devoutly celebrating the feast of Demetrius the Martyr, who prays unceasingly to Christ that He grant to all peace and mercy." says the Sessional Hymn in Matins. "You are to us," we read in the stichera at the aposticha in the Small Vespers service, "a benefactor of numerous gifts, O Ambassador of the Lord, because you fulfill all our requests."

St. Demetrius not only is a miracle-worker and intercessor in heaven, but also one from whose bones miraculous myrrh (oil) exuded. We read in the first Ode of the canon in Matins, "O Demetrius, you who are a fountain of fragrant and pure myrrh, cleanse my heart of all loathsome passions, and through the practice of virtue, make me fragrant with the odor of piety, and my mind noble and upright, in order that I may sing praises in honor of your divine gifts."

### **St. Demetrius — Our Model and Intercessor**

The main purpose for the celebration of the feasts of the holy Martyrs is to meditate and admire their heroic profession of holy faith, and to learn from them to love our faith, cherish

it, practice it and courageously profess it. The external profession of faith is the mark of a good and practicing Christian. A good Christian never hides his faith, is not ashamed of it, does not deny it, barter with it, or change it, but openly and bravely professes it by word and deed. Christ demands such faith from every one of us. Jesus Himself said: "Therefore, everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I in turn will disown him before my Father in heaven." (Matthew 10,32-33)

Every act of our whole life must be a sermon on our holy faith. "The profession of faith," says St. John Chrysostom, "is expressed not only in word but also in deeds. When they are lacking, then we are exposing ourselves to the danger of being punished along with those who have denied their faith."

Holy Church wishes and strongly recommends that we not only imitate the Saints, but also have recourse to them in matters of soul and body. It goes without saying that the Lord God gladly hears the requests of those who, for His sake, shed their blood and offered up their lives for Him. The Servant of God, Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky, says: "Whoever has recourse with great faith to a Martyr, he may expect through his intercession anything from God. Theodoret lists in detail the various gifts one may expect through the intercession of such a Martyr: health, progeny, successful journeys, and cures of various kinds. In this regard, "Proof that prayer offered up with faith is heard," he writes, "are those votive offerings which testify to the various cures. Those votive offerings represent eyes, feet, hands, of gold or silver, as well as more simple and modest offerings, according to the means of the offerer. These objects are evidence of the cures, received by the donors, and of the power of the Martyr's intercession." The cycle of the Liturgical Year clearly presents the entire history of the Church to us — from the infants slaughtered by Herod for the sake of Christ and the great protomartyr Stephen to those who laid down their lives for holy icons and to our priest-martyr St. Josaphat, archbishop of Polotsk." (On the Veneration of Saints, 1941)

# Synaxis of St. Michael the Archangel

*“All heavenly Powers, holy Angels and Archangels, pray to God for us sinners.”  
(Great Compline)*

Our Liturgical Year is like a beautiful mosaic made up of the feasts of our Lord, the Mother of God, and an immense throng of Martyrs and Saints. The center of this splendid mosaic is our Lord Jesus Christ, as God and as Man. Day and night, His Pilgrim Church on earth and in heaven, the Church in glory, that is — the very great choir of Angels and Saints — sing to Him eternal praises. The holy Angels are God’s everlasting choir of glory; they are the messengers and servants of God. The Angels also fulfill a great role in the redemption of the human race.

Holy Church, conscious of the great significance of the Angels for the glory of God and our salvation, has provided a special place for the veneration of the Angels in the mosaic of the Liturgical Year. Here, first place is given to the feast of the Synaxis of St. Michael the Archangel and the rest of the Angelic Powers. To encourage greater devotion to the Angels, it seems appropriate to say a few words here about their cult, the purpose of this feast, and its spiritual significance for us.

## The Veneration of the Holy Angels

Before the Lord God created man, He created the holy Angels who are invisible, immortal, perfect beings and pure spirits, possessing a keen intellect and free will. Their number is immeasurably great, as we know from the vision granted to the prophet Daniel who saw the throne of God where “thousands upon thousands were ministering Him, and myriads upon myriads attended Him.” (7,10) In the Book of

Revelation St. John the Theologian says: "In my vision I heard the sound of an immense number of Angels gathered round the throne and the living creatures and the elders. They were countless in number, thousands and tens of thousands..." (5,11-12) Christ himself in the Gospel speaks of legions of Angels. (Matthew 26,53)

Ever since the time of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (5c), it has been customary to divide the Angels into three orders, each composed of three choirs, giving a total of nine angelic choirs: the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones; Dominations, Virtues and Powers; Principalities, Archangels and Angels.

The Lord God, after creating the Angels, put them to a test and a great number of the Angels' rebelled against Him. St. John the Theologian speaks of a war in heaven (Book of Revelation 12,7). At the head of the good Angels stood the Archangel Michael who overcame Lucifer and his angels. Hence, in the veneration of the Angels, the holy Church gives first place to St. Michael.

The holy Angels have a twofold task: one in relation to God and the other in relation to man. The chief task of the Angels in heaven is to continually praise and glorify God. The prophet Isaiah saw in a vision how the Seraphim cried out: "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts; all the earth is full of his glory." (6,3) Our Divine Liturgy speaks of this noble task of the Angels in several places: "O Lord, Our Master and God," says the prayer of the Little Entrance, "You, who in heaven have established orders and armies of angels and archangels for the service of your glory..." In the Prayer of the Trisagion which is recited during the troparion, the priest prays: "O holy God, Who abide in the Saints, who are praised by the thrice-holy voice of the Seraphim, and are glorified by the Cherubim, and are adored by all the heavenly powers..." The second task of the Angels in relation to God is their zealous and immediate service of Him. The word "angel" is a Greek word meaning messenger, or herald, that is, one who announces. Thus the Angels are God's messengers, announcers or heralds. Many examples are given in the Old and New Testaments of their role as messengers of God.

In reference to men, according to the will of God, the Angels are our guardians and protectors. In Psalm 90 it is affirmed: "For he has given his angels charge over you, to keep





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you in all your ways.” (11) The angels whose task is to protect men, we call guardian Angels. The Fathers of the Church teach that every person has his own guardian Angel. St. Basil the Great says: “No one denies that each of the faithful has his or her own Angel.” (Against Eunomius 3,1) St. John Chrysostom similarly affirms, “Each and everyone of us has an Angel.” (Sermon 26, on Acts 12,1-3). In the Ektenia of Petition of the Divine Liturgy we beg God for a guardian Angel: “For an angel of peace, a faithful guide, a guardian of our souls and bodies, let us beseech the Lord.” Using the Holy Scripture as their foundation, the holy Fathers teach that not only every person, but also every community, Church, and nation has its own guardian Angel.

From what has been said above, it is clear why holy Church cultivates and commends the cult of the Angels, and why they occupy a special place in our Ecclesiastical Year and in our divine services. The veneration of Angels in the Eastern Church had its beginning as far back as the third century; in the fourth century it was already widespread. Proof of this is the church in honor of St. Michael Archangel which Constantine the Great built in the suburbs of Constantinople (274-337). According to the testimony of the historian Sozomen, numerous miraculous cures were wrought in that church. During the Divine Liturgy our Church prescribes that a special particle of the prosphora be placed on the discos in honor of the “holy heavenly and bodiless powers.” In our Octoechos there is a service dedicated to the Angels reserved for Monday, the first day of the week, perhaps because they were the first creatures to be created by God and in heaven, next to the Blessed Mother, they stand nearest the throne of God.

The feast in honor of St. Michael the Archangel and all the other angelic hosts was established in the fourth century. This feast is called a synaxis (or assembly) because on this day the Church celebrates the assembly of all the bodiless powers together with St. Michael the Archangel, Chief of the heavenly hosts, and the assembly of the faithful on earth who gather together to pay homage to the heavenly powers.

We celebrate the Synaxis of St. Michael the Archangel in November, because formerly when the year began with the month of March, this month was the ninth month in the year,

and hence, it bore a symbolic relationship to the nine choirs of angels.

From the fourth century the Eastern Church also celebrates the memory of St. Michael the Archangel on the 6th of September, recalling the miraculous protection of the church dedicated to him, from destruction in Colossae, Phrygia. Besides the feast of the Synaxis of St. Michael the Archangel, we have two more special days in the year dedicated to the Archangel Gabriel. He announced the incarnation of the Son of God to the Blessed Virgin Mary, hence, on the day after the feast of the Annunciation, the 26th of March, our Church celebrates his synaxis; on that day the faithful gathered to pay special veneration to him. Since the ninth century, our Church Calendar has had still another synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel on the 13th of July, in order to honor him for all his wonderful apparitions.

Since the fifth century, the Western Church has celebrated the apparition of St. Michael the Archangel on May 8 at Gargan Mountain in Apulia, and another apparition on September 29 at the fortress of Castelangelo in Rome. In the seventeenth century, the Latin Church dedicated the first Sunday of September to the holy Guardian Angels.

### **The Aim of the Feast of the Synaxis of St. Michael the Archangel**

The chief aim of the feast is to praise and honor St. Michael the Archangel and the entire heavenly host. All his glory stems from the fact that in defence of God's glory he led all the good angels against the rebellion of Satan. Hence, his noble title "Chief Captain or Commander-in-Chief" of the Angels. He is represented in iconography as a military leader clothed in full armor with a helmet on his head and a fiery sword in his hand, while under his feet writhes the dragon, symbol of Satan.

The service of this day sings the praises of St. Michael's greatness before the throne of God, his zeal and faithfulness to God, his protection of us, and his intercession on our behalf. Here we give a few expressions of praise taken from the sticheras of the Vespers and Matins services: "O Leader of the Angelic Choirs", "O Michael, brilliant representative of the Thrice-radiant Divinity", "O leader of the heavenly

Powers, Michael, Chief Captain of the Divine Choirs", "Michael, Archchieftain of the heavenly Powers", "You are the first among the bodiless Angels", "You are the leader, the champion, and the chief captain of the Angels, O Commander-in-Chief", "of the angelic armies you are the highest", "among Christians you are a saving defender", "O Michael, Chief Captain, we faithfully sing to you as to a powerful defender, protector, and deliverer of men." On the day of his feast, St. Michael calls all the faithful to a common assembly with the Angels in order to give fitting glory to God: "As the leader of the divine Powers, Michael today calls all the choirs of men to form one glorious feast with the Angels, a feast of divine synaxis (assembly) so that we, together with them, may sing a holy hymn to God." (Stichera at the Praises in Matins)

This feast glorifies also the angelic choirs for they too, with St. Michael, form a most wonderful assembly. Hence, today we praise also the Angels, we magnify them, we thank them and implore their protection: "Come O lovers of feasts and lovers of Christ," we sing in the stichera of Litiya, "with the flowers of virtue, pure thoughts and a good conscience, let us honor the assembly of Archangels for they stand continuously before God, singing the thrice-holy hymn and praying for the salvation of our souls." In the first Sessional Hymn in the Matins service, we sing: "You who continuously stand before the awesome throne, illuminated by the brilliant rays of the thrice-radiant God, enlighten us and drive away the darkness of sin from us who solemnly celebrate your assembly; and fervently pray for us that we may be delivered from misfortune, O most illustrious Intercessors."

### **The Significance of the Feast**

The feast of the Archangel Michael and the holy Angels indicates to us the significant role the Angels play in our salvation. This feast also reminds us of our duties towards the Angels, especially toward our Guardian Angel. Throughout our entire life, at every moment and in every place our guardian angel watches over us, protects us, inspires us with good thoughts, warns us against sin, and intercedes for us before God. Our Guardian Angel is our guide to heaven, our helper against temptation, our companion at the hour of death. He is the constant witness of our thoughts, our words, and our



*Golden-Domed Cathedral of St. Michael in Kiev (1108)*

deeds. Only in heaven will we one day see how much we owe to our Guardian Angel. From this comes our duty to venerate the holy Angels, to praise them, and to thank them every day for their assistance and protection. "To glorify the Angels is our obligation," we read in a sermon ascribed to St. John Chrysostom on the Synaxis of Archangels, "for they glorify the Creator, reveal his love and mercy toward man." Let us entrust our children to their Guardian Angels from the time they are in the cradle; let us teach our children to love their angels and pray to them every day. Church history records numerous instances in which the Guardian Angel miraculously protected children who were in danger. "The Angels are given to us," says the servant of God Andrew Sheptytsky, "for Guardians and Protectors throughout our whole life; therefore, it goes without saying that the daily protection of our Guardian Angels should lead each and every one of us to sincerely venerate and thank our Guardian Angels." (On the Veneration of Saints, 1941)

Devotion to our own Guardian Angel is pleasing to him, not only when we venerate and pray to him, but above all, when we imitate him. He gives us a beautiful example of holiness. He teaches us by his example how to love God, how to serve him and glorify him. Therefore let us strive to love God as our Angel loves him, with greater fervour, and zealously carry out God's will, as he does and as do all the other Angels in heaven.

## The Feast of the Priest-Martyr St. Josaphat

*“O Priest-martyr Josaphat, you have  
shone forth as a brilliant lamp,  
for as a good shepherd you gave up  
your life for your sheep...”  
(Troparion of the feast)*

The feast of St. Josaphat, Priest-martyr, is especially dear, glorious and joyful for the faithful of the Ukrainian Catholic Church because it is a feast of our own Ukrainian Saint, our brother who is of our own flesh and bone; it is the feast of a great Apostle and Martyr for the holy faith and the unity of the Churches.

Not only our own Ukrainian Catholic Church, but the entire Catholic Church venerates, praises, and prays to St. Josaphat and erects churches in his honor. His relics are enshrined in the center of the Catholic world — in the Basilica of the Apostle St. Peter in Rome. St. Josaphat is the first Ukrainian Saint ever to be canonized by the Catholic Church. It is due to him and to his martyrdom that today we profess the true Christian faith and are members of the true Church of Christ.

We do not intend here to recall the history of his life, canonization, or cult, but will instead examine the significant features of his personality and character for which holy Church canonized him and listed him among the holy Martyrs. We can characterize the person of St. Josaphat in three words: he was Holy, he was an Apostle, and he was a Martyr.

### **St. Josaphat — a Canonized Saint**

In heaven there are thousands upon thousands of anonymous Saints. However, there are many other Saints



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who, during their lifetime on earth, were distinguished for their holiness and heroic love of God and neighbor, and whom the Lord God glorified after their death. These, holy Church has raised to the altar of the Saints and directed that they be venerated. These are the canonized Saints, and St. Josaphat, Priest-martyr, is one of them.

St. Josaphat embarked upon the path of holiness while still a boy, from the moment that a spark of love fell from a crucifix upon his innocent youthful heart. This spark was never extinguished but over the years was kindled into a great fire of love for God and neighbor. The desire for holiness led him to enter the monastery of the Order of Saint Basil the Great, in Vilna. Here he quickly advanced in holiness through love of prayer and meditation, through various penitential acts, and through his love for the divine office which he soon committed to memory. Here he delved into liturgical books that continuously placed an example of the Saints and holy Martyrs before his eyes. From these books he learned about holiness, and acquired a knowledge of our holy faith and a great love for our Rite and church services. Of all the spiritual practices, he loved the Divine Liturgy most of all. As a monk he gladly assisted in the Liturgy, and later, as a priest and bishop, he offered It with angelic devotion. At the foot of the Eucharistic Christ, he prayed for whole hours and sometimes throughout a great part of the night.

As a priest and later as a bishop, he burned himself out like a candle in the service of God and of neighbor. His spirit of zeal and sacrifice for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls was greatly admired by his associates, his friends, and even by his enemies. After his death, over 150 witnesses confirmed the holiness of his life under oath. Metropolitan Joseph V. Rutsky, notifying the Holy See of the death of St. Josaphat, wrote in his letter of the 23rd of December, 1623: "I grieve over the fact that they have physically taken from me him who was my right arm...however, I am filled with the hope that he will continue to work for our benefit with far greater power in heaven than he could do while here on earth, because this holy Martyr gave up his life for the glory of God, for the holy Union, and for the primacy of the Apostolic See." Alexander Tyshkevych, the chief judge in the region of Polotsk, who knew St. Josaphat during the whole time of his episcopate and held frequent conversations with him, in 1628



testified under oath: "I know that the servant of God, Josaphat, was and is still today revered and honored by all as a Saint and a great servant of God."

But the most trustworthy witness of the holiness of St. Josaphat is the Lord God Himself who, after Josaphat's death, glorified him with miracles. These began to occur immediately after his martyrdom. Among the outstanding miracles is the preservation of his body which remained incorruptible for many years after death. Other miracles include the conversion of almost all his murderers and the conversion of the Orthodox Bishop, Meletius Smotryckyj, who was responsible for St. Josaphat's death. There were many other miraculous conversions and cures, such as, the restoration of sight to the blind, the cure of heart disease and paralysis, and deliverance from various dangers. All these miracles have been verified by the Church, and were confirmed, under oath, by those who were beneficiaries or eye-witnesses of these miracles. In 1628, St. Josaphat's confessor, Father Gennadius Khmelnytskyj, testified to the following: "People from all over flock to his tomb, all invoke his intercession, and through him great graces and miracles are being wrought."

Therefore, it is not surprising that holy Church, after conducting several very strict inquiries into the life of St. Josaphat, judged him worthy of canonization. Pope Pius IX, on June 29, 1867 enrolled Josaphat among the Saints officially recognized by the Church. "Pius, bishop, the servant of servants of God..." reads the Bull of canonization, "has decreed and defined that the said blessed Josaphat, Archbishop of Polotsk, of the Ruthenian Rite, is to be regarded as a Saint, and has inscribed him in the register of holy Martyrs."

### **St. Josaphat — Apostle of Christ**

True holiness has that beautiful characteristic that prevents it from turning in upon itself, requiring rather that it be completely outgoing, never avoiding people, but rather seeking to make them good and holy, to lead others to Christ and to be, for all, an apostle of Christian truth.

The flaming love of God and zeal for God's glory thrust St. Josaphat into the vortex of tireless, sacrificial activity for the salvation of others. He was consumed with only one desire: to bring the light of holy faith to every person and to lead as

many as possible to Christ. The means he used in his apostolate were prayer, the living word, and the example of his life.

Even before St. Josaphat became a priest, he practiced a hidden apostolate of prayer, sacrifice, and penance. Day and night he prayed in his cell, in the church, and at the cemetery; he prayed especially for the union of Churches.

As a priest and bishop, he used the two-edged sword of the word of God. His sermons flowed from great conviction and from the depths of the soul; hence, they were powerful, convincing and moving. Even hardened sinners were unable to resist them. The church was always filled when he preached. "He preached on every feast day," says the Archpresbyter of Polotsk, Jacob Dyakonytskyj, "moreover, whenever possible, he would prepare a holy banquet of spiritual instruction. His words pierced the heart and forced tears from the eyes." His sermons moved so many persons to embrace the true faith that his enemies called him "soul-snatcher". Wayward souls, stirred by the grace of God and by the power of his word, became reconciled with God in the holy Sacrament of Penance. So many penitents flocked to him that sometimes he spent as many as six hours a day in the confessional. Besides the living word, he carried on the apostolate of the printed word. He wrote in defense of the holy faith and union, and composed a catechism and directives for his priests.

St. Josaphat not only carried on an apostolate of prayer and of the spoken and printed word, but also one of good example. He practiced what he preached to others. Even his enemies could not level any accusations against him. His heart was opened to all and embraced all with love. He was always approachable, always humble, always forgiving. He received his enemies gladly, forgave and prayed for them. When his enemies called him "soul-snatcher", he replied: "God grant, that I snatch all your souls and lead them to heaven."

With his love he especially embraced the poor, the invalid, the sick and orphans. Metropolitan Raphael Korsak (†1640), in his records of the Beatification Process, writes of the mercy of St. Josaphat: "He never neglected to give alms to the poor, to widows, and especially to orphans. For this reason, everyone loved him; whenever he would leave the church in Vilna, all the people would flock to the church doors, desiring to seek consolation in his words. When he was raised from the dignity



*Relics of St. Josaphat in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, Italy*

of the hegumen of the Vilna monastery to that of Archbishop of Polotsk, the poor accompanied him, their guardian and father, with great mourning."

### **St. Josaphat — Martyr for the Faith**

St. Josaphat was not only a great Saint and zealous Apostle of Christ but was also a Martyr. In iconography he is frequently seen holding in his hands the palm of martyrdom for the holy faith and for the union of our Church with the Apostolic See of Peter. Where there is true holiness and apostolic zeal, there is also readiness for total self-sacrifice, for suffering and death for the holy faith. Proof of this is given by thousands and hundreds of thousands of holy Martyrs, from the beginning of Christianity up to our own times. In martyrdom, all the virtues manifest themselves in a heroic degree, especially those of unshakeable faith, firm hope, love full of dedication, and fortitude worthy of praise. We find all of these manifested in the life of the priest-martyr, St. Josaphat.

His martyrdom did not take him by surprise. He had desired it for a long time; he had spoken about it and prepared for it. While still living, he was making ready his tomb in his cathedral in Polotsk. The witness of his death, Father Dorotheus Letsykovich, testified in 1628 before the Beatification Commission: "In his sermons, conversations, letters, he always made known his desire for death, and whenever possible, he would say that he desired nothing more than to die for God". To his enemies who threatened him with death, he said: "You threaten me with death, but I tell you: nothing would make me happier than to die by your hands for the Catholic and apostolic faith."

St. Josaphat not only desired to die for the holy faith but voluntarily went forth to meet suffering and death. He knew that the enemies of the Union in Vitebsk were conspiring to kill him, yet he still went there for visitation. They warned him that certain death awaited him if he came, but he answered: "God grant that I shed my blood for the lost sheep, that all may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, and that having accepted the holy Union, all preserve it with mutual love."

After praying all night on the 12th of November, accord-

ing to the old Julian calendar in the year 1623, he gave up his innocent life in order to fulfill the words of Christ: "That there be one flock and one shepherd." (John 10,16) He died defending the truths expressed in the Creed, "I believe in one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church."

May the words of Archbishop Major Cardinal Joseph spoken at the tomb of St. Josaphat on the 25th of November, 1969, be an inspiration to all of us to venerate and imitate him in the love of our holy faith: "May St. Josaphat, a faithful son of the Church and nation, lead our nation to victory. He defended the union of the Church and nation all his life. Even in Polotsk, in White Russia, he regarded himself as a Ukrainian, and had also convinced the monks of the Kievan Lavra about the need for Church union. His strong character and heroic holiness of life must also encourage and inspire us to follow in his footsteps, even if we should be required to sacrifice our life for God, the Church and the nation." (Blahovisnyk, V, 1-4, 1969)



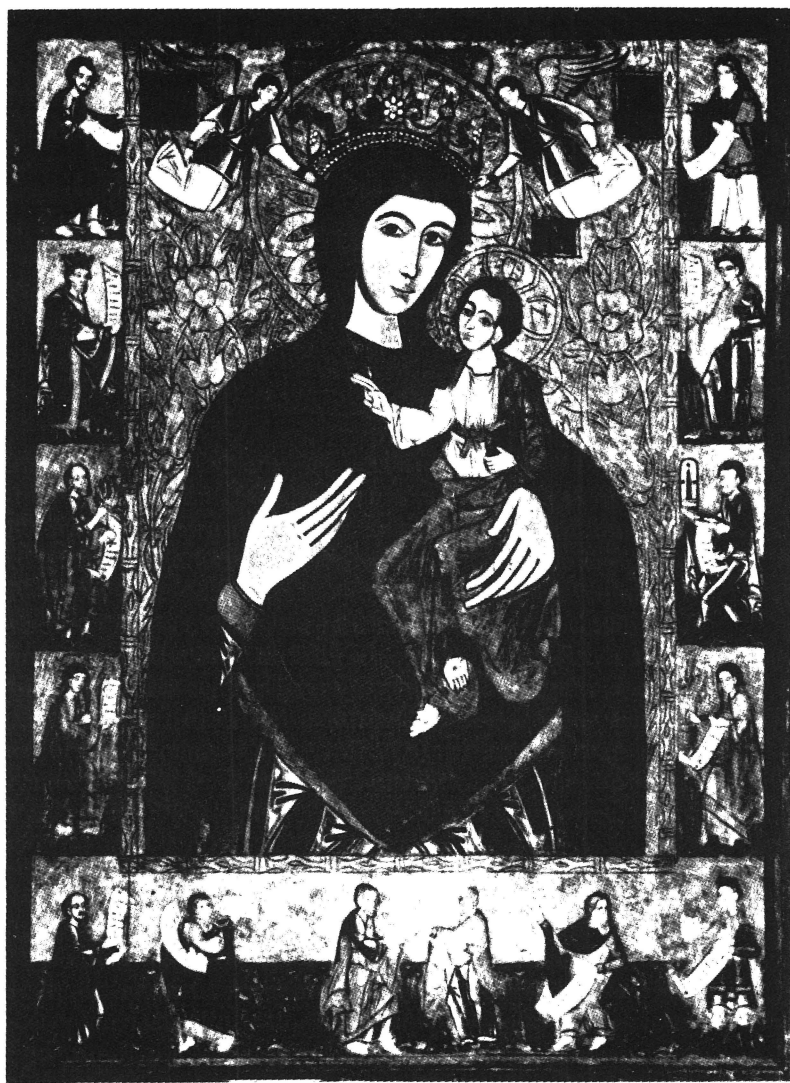
# **The Fast Before the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ**

*“Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand... Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his path.” (Matthew 3,2-3)*

When one examines our Ecclesiastical Year closely he immediately notices that our Eastern Church always prepares herself for the great and glorious feasts by a short or long fast. We have a great and holy fast before the feast of the Resurrection. We have a one day fast before certain feasts. We have a fast of several days before the feast of SS. Peter and Paul and the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God. We have, finally, a long fast before the feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. This feast, like the feast of the Resurrection is one of the major feasts of the Church Year; for this reason, its fast is patterned after that of the paschal fast. It even bears the name “Forty Days” Fast. Let us consider its history, duration and purpose.

## **History of the Christmas Fast**

**1. In the West:** Between the fourth and fifth centuries the so-called “Fasts of the Four Seasons of the Year” sprang into existence in the West. Pope Leo I (440-461) spoke of these fasts: “In the course of the whole year, fasts are so arranged that the law of abstinence is prescribed for all the seasons of the year, namely, the spring fast takes place during the Forty Days Fast, the summer fast during the Pentecost, autumn fast in the seventh month, and the winter fast in the tenth month.” Pope Leo I gives gratitude to God for the harvest as the motive for establishing these four fasts.



*The Virgin Hodigitria in Szczawnik, Western Ukraine. (1631)*

Of these four fasts, the winter fast is the nucleus of the Christmas fast. This fast originated in ancient Gaul (present day France) where mention is made of a fast in preparation for the Nativity of Our Lord (Christmas) as early as the fifth century. Bishop Gregory of Tours (†594) says that St. Perpetuus, Bishop of Tours (†491) fasted on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday, beginning on the day of St. Martin (11th of November) until the Nativity of our Lord. The Council of Tours II (567) prescribed a daily fast for the monks in the month of December until Christmas. At a somewhat later date, this fast passed over to Rome and Italy, and then to England. In time, the Christmas fast in the West received the name "advent", which in Latin means "a coming", that is, the "coming" of Christ. Originally, the word "advent" (coming) stood for the feast of Christmas; later, it came to mean the period before Christmas. In the ninth century, the West designated the first Sunday of Advent as the beginning of the Church Year.

**2. In the East:** Although in the West the pre-Christmas fast had already become a general practice in the sixth century, in the East, at that time, the pre-Christmas fast was just becoming a practice due to Western influence. First mention of the Christmas fast, which began on the 14th of November, was made in the Coptic Calendar of the eighth century.

The following rule is attributed to John the Faster (582-595), Patriarch of Constantinople: "It is fitting that the laity abstain from meat during the two Forty Days Fasts, that is, the Fast of St. Philip and the Fast of the Apostles SS. Peter and Paul." In the ninth century, the Christmas fast became universal throughout the East.

### **Purpose of the Christmas Fast**

From earliest times, the feast of Christmas was given equal rank with the feast of the Resurrection (Easter). For this reason the Typicon looks upon the Nativity of Christ as another Pasch (Easter). In the old typicons and liturgical Psalters, under the 25th of December, there is this note: "The Pasch, a three-day feast." Thus, just as the faithful prepared themselves for the feast of the Pasch with prayer and fasting, so too, they prepared themselves for the coming of Christ the



Saviour with the Christmas fast. Simeon of Thessalonika (†1429) says: "This Forty' Days Fast is similar to the fast of Moses, who fasted forty days and nights and received the table of God's commandments. Let us also fast forty days and we too shall receive the living Word of God incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and partake of His Precious Body."

For the Church the Christmas fast became the symbol of the prayers and fasts of the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, who awaited the coming of the Messiah with longing. During the time of this fast, holy Church, desiring to strengthen her faithful with the example of the Saints of the Old and New Testaments, celebrated the memory of certain



*Monastery of the Caves in Kiev, Ukraine*

prophets: the prophet Abdias on the 19th of November; Nahum — December 1; Habacuc — December 2; Sophonias — December 3; Hageas — December 16; and Daniel — December 17; the holy Apostles — Matthew — November 16 and Andrew — November 30; the Bishop St. Nicholas — December 6; the venerable John Damascene — December 4 and Sabbas the Sanctified — December 5; the more outstanding women and men Martyrs — such as, Huria — November 11; Catherine — December 24; Barbara — December 4; Eustratius — December 13; Ignatius the God-bearer — December 20; Anastasius —

December 22; and Eugene — December 24, and finally the two last Sundays dedicated to the Old Testament Forefathers and Fathers.

Our Church has a very ancient tradition according to which the faithful prepare themselves for the feast of the Nativity of our Lord, not only by prayer and fasting, but also by participating in the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist. George, the Kievan Metropolitan (1072-1073), in his Directives for priests and laity recommends Holy Communion, among other practices, for Christmas. (9) St. Josaphat in his "Rules for Priests" advises them to encourage the faithful to go to confession during the Pylypiwka fast. In his Euchologion the Kievan Metropolitan, Peter Mohyla (†1647), prescribes confession and Holy Communion for the faithful during every one of the four fasts. The Synod of Zamost (1720) prescribes confession and Holy Communion at least three times a year — that is at Easter time, the Dormition of the Mother of God, and at Christmas. This same synod prescribes abstinence from dairy products throughout the entire Pylypiwka. The Synod of Lviv (1891) mitigates the Christmas fast somewhat, allowing dairy products on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and during the remaining four weeks meat, but it directs the priest to recite Psalm 50, and for the laity five "Our Father's" and five "Hail Mary's" before the noon meal and before supper.

### **Duration of the Christmas Fast**

**1. In the West:** The Council of Saragossa (380) prescribed a three-week fast before the feast of the Epiphany, which at that time was still celebrated together with Christmas. The Council of Macon (581) in France, extended throughout entire France the practice in which the eparchy of Tours, beginning from the feast of St. Martin, the 11th of November, fasted three times a week. Since this feast began with the feast of St. Martin, it came to be called the fast of St. Martin. In time this fast was extended from three days to forty days, on the model of the fast before the feast of Easter. Pope Gregory VII (1037-1085), reduced the number of the Sundays of Advent to four to symbolize the four thousand years before the coming of Christ.

**2. In the East:** Although in the East the Christmas fast generally began on the 14th of November, its duration was undetermined and subject to dispute for some time. The reason for this was that in the East only the paschal (Easter) fast was prescribed by the Church while the three other yearly fasts, that is, the fasts of the holy Apostles, the Dormition of the Blessed Mother, and Christmas, developed through custom rather than legislation. In the East, as early as the ninth century, disputes arose in reference to the duration of this fast. The work, "On the Three Forty Days Fasts", which is ascribed to the Antiochian Patriarch, Anastasius Sinaite (561-600), speaks about disputes concerning the obligation of the Christmas fast, some contending that its institution originated not with the Apostles, but with the monks, and also that its duration was limited to eighteen, twelve, six, or four days. The author tries to defend the apostolic origin and the general obligation of the Christmas fast, at the same time appealing to the tradition concerning the Apostle St. Philip. That tradition says that before his martyrdom, St. Philip implored God's punishment upon his torturers. Instead, it was revealed to him that, as a penance, he would not enter paradise until forty days after his death. Therefore, St. Philip begged the other Apostles to fast forty days on his behalf; the apostles then prescribed a forty days fast for all the faithful.

It must be noted that in regard to the work "On the Three Forty Days Fasts", historians are of the opinion that this work could not have appeared earlier than the ninth century because it speaks of the fast of the Dormition which was not known prior to the ninth century.

In Antioch, the Christmas fast was known from the beginning of the sixth century and began on the first of December. At that time, it was practiced in Jerusalem and lasted forty days. In the ninth century, the Studite Typicon gave detailed prescriptions regarding food that could be eaten during the fast of St. Philip.

Not until the Council of Constantinople in 1166 was the duration of the Christmas fast finally determined. This Council, held during the time of Patriarch Lukas Chrysobergas and Emperor Manuel Comnen, legislated a forty days fast before Christmas and ordered it to begin with the feast of St. Philip, that is, on the 14th of November. For this reason, it received the name of the Fast of St. Philip or Pylypiwka (in Ukrainian).

The Antiochian Patriarch, Theodore Balsamon (1185--1204), in explaining this rule of the Council, observed that this fast obliged all the monks in its entirety, although the laity may shorten it to seven days. According to the testimony of the Byzantine writer, George Codin (†c1450), at the Emperor's Court in Constantinople, the Christmas fast was observed for forty days.

In Rus-Ukraine during the pre-mongolian period, according to the "Rules" of the Metropolitan of Kiev, George, in addition to the paschal fast there were three other annual fasts. They began at the same time as today, but the Dormition fast was not observed everywhere and was shorter. Metropolitan George called the Christmas fast the Fast of St. Philip or St. Philip's Fast (Pylypiwka) which means that it began on November 14, the Feast of St. Philip. During St. Philip's Fast, he prescribed exactly the same fast and bows as during the Petriwka or St. Peter's Fast; food was to be taken once a day without milk and meat, and on Saturday and Sunday fish was allowed twice a day. Kievan Metropolitan Maxim (1283-1305) called the Christmas Fast, the Forty Days Fast.

In our times, holy Church for various just reasons has somewhat mitigated the once very strict fasts and left them to the free choice of the faithful. However, this does not mean that we are not obliged to practice the spirit of sacrifice, penance and fasting. Therefore, let our love of Christ, the good of our souls, and the love of our sacred tradition be the principal motives in our preparation for Christmas — through prayer, fasting, and the reception of the Holy Sacraments.



*Pochaiw Monastery — the most renowned center  
of Monasticism in Western Ukraine*

# **The Presentation of the Most Holy Mother of God in the Temple**

*“The most pure Temple of the Saviour,  
the most precious chamber and Virgin;  
sacred treasure of God’s glory, today  
is being presented in the house of  
the Lord.” (Kontakion of the feast)*

The festivals of the Most Holy Mother of God occupy first place in our Church calendar after the feasts of our Lord. The chief aim of the Marian feasts is to set before us the majesty, dignity and the holiness of the Most Pure Virgin Mary, and her role in the redemption of the human race, so that we may be inspired to venerate and imitate her. The greatest Marian feasts, such as her Nativity and Dormition, speak to us either of the very first moments of her existence on earth or of her departure into eternity. The only feast that has for its theme the childhood and youthful years of the Mother of God is the feast of the Presentation in the Temple, which we celebrate on the 21st of November. In our church services this feast has the name: “The Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Queen, Mother of God and ever-Virgin Mary”. The purpose of this feast is to remove the veil of certain mysteries from the childhood and youthful years of the Blessed Mother, and to throw some light on the mystery of her parents, her training in the temple, and her preparation for the supreme dignity of being the Mother of God. In meditating on this feast, we shall draw our attention to three things: its history, its church service, and its spiritual significance for us.

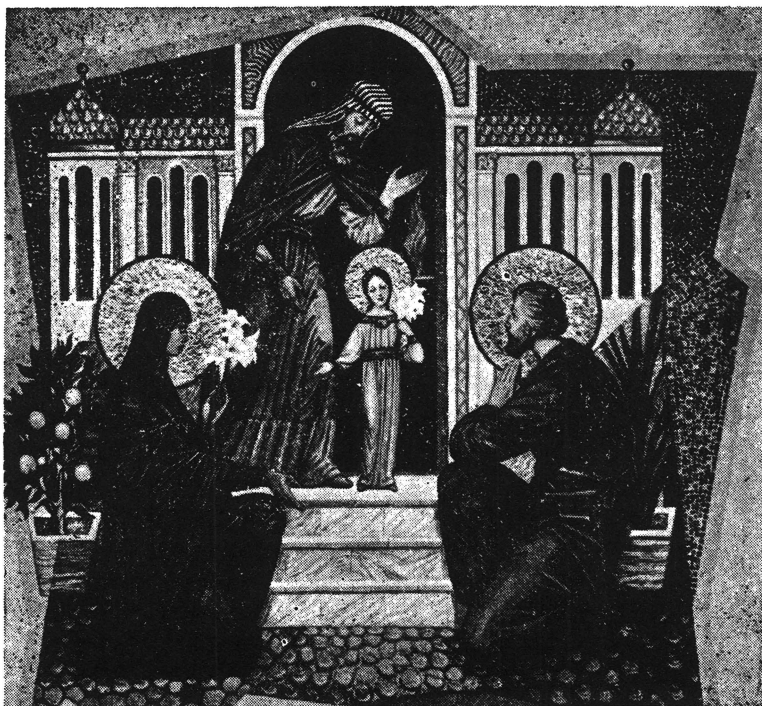
## **History of the Feast**

The Holy Gospel says nothing about the entrance of Our

Lady into the temple. This feast, like the feasts of the Nativity and Dormition of the Mother of God, traces its origin to the tradition of the Church and apocryphal writings, especially the Proto-evangelium of James and the Pseudo-Evangelium of Matthew "Concerning the Nativity of the Most Pure Virgin Mary". From these writings, we learn that the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary, SS. Joachim and Anna, being childless, had made a promise that, if they were blessed with a child, they would offer that child up to the service of the Lord in the temple in Jerusalem. The Lord God heard their prayers and blessed them with a daughter. When the little one was three years old, her parents brought her to the temple and placed her under the care of the high priest Zachary, the father of St. John the Baptist. Here the Most Holy Mother of God spent many years until, as a mature maiden, she was betrothed to St. Joseph.

The feast of the Entrance (Presentation) is one of the twelve great feastdays, having a one day pre-feast and a four day post-feast. Allusions are made to this feast in the fifth century; however, it took several hundred years before it was universally observed in the East. From the sermons of the Patriarchs of Constantinople, Germanus (715-730) and Tarasius (784-806), commemorating this feast, it can be inferred that the feast of the Entrance was established in the eighth century. The Sinai Gospel of the eighth century, which Emperor Theodosius III (715-717) donated to the Sinai monastery, mentions the feast of the Entrance among the twelve feasts. This feast is found in the Greek menaions of the ninth century; it finally became a universally recognized and celebrated feast in that century. The Sinai Canonarium of the ninth-tenth century gives the feast under the title of the "Feast of the Most Holy Mother of God, when She was brought to the Temple at the Age of Three." The Typicon of the Great Church of Constantinople (9-10 c), though it does not have either the Epistle or the Gospel for that feast, has a note under the 21st of November stating: "The Synaxis of the Holy Mother of God, when She was presented to the Temple of the Lord at the Age of Three". The Evergetes Typicon of the eleventh century has the service of the Presentation with a pre- and post-feast. The service for this feast was composed by Gregory of Nicomedia (9c), Basil Pagariot, and Sergius Hagiorite.

In the West, the feast of the Entrance took root somewhat later, at the end of the fourteenth century; however, in the middle of the fifteenth century, it spread throughout all Europe. The West celebrates this feast on the same day that the Eastern Church celebrates it, that is, on the 21st of November. In the Middle Ages the Feast of the Entrance was a favorite theme in iconography.



*By Michael Dmytrenko*

### **Spirit of the Service of the Feast**

The service of this feast celebrates the event of the Entrance into the Temple with joyful and glad melodies; it praises the dignity of the Mother of God and extols the great sacrifice of her parents. The songs and hymns of this day are very rich in poetic expression, allegory and allusion. This profound dogmatic poetry sings the praises of the Divine Maternity, Virginity, Holiness and Intercession of the Most Pure

Virgin Mary in very beautiful analogies and symbols. Mary is most frequently extolled as the Temple of God, an allusion to the temple to which she was brought by her parents. Here we have some expressions from the sticheras and the canon of the feast; "You are the temple of God", "the Divine Temple", "the Sanctified Temple", "the Temple which is to contain the Son of God", "the Temple and Altar of the King of all", "the living Temple of the holy glory of Christ our God", "the most holy Temple of our holy God", "the God-containing Temple", "the Temple and Palace", "the Temple and Palace and living Heaven".

In a special manner her Virginity, Immaculate Purity and Divine Motherhood are also glorified. Mary is "a golden dove", "a Palace filled with glory", "the holy altar", "Virgin immaculate", "the Virgin pure", "God-containing palace", "Divine Virgin Mother of the Creator", "Immaculate Offering", "God-pleasing sacrifice", "Vessel most holy", "Mother of the Word of life", "Undefiled Ark of God the Creator", "the Maiden of God, the King of all", "living tabernacle that contains the uncontainable Word", "the one and only blessed among women", "the divine altar, palace, bed and bright dwelling-place of the King of all", "Virgin one and only immaculate", "Pure ever-Virgin", "living chamber of God", "holy tabernacle, golden thurible, candlestick and table", "the immaculate Ewe (She-Lamb)".

The Most Holy Mother of God when entering the Temple, though she was merely a child, was, nevertheless, mature in spirit: "May the Divine Maiden, three years old physically," says the third Ode of the canon, "but spiritually older, wider than the heavens, and higher than the Heavenly Powers, be glorified with hymns." She is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and the glory of the New Testament: "You are the object of the preaching of the prophets, the glory of the Apostles, praise of the Martyrs, and the renewal of all people, Virgin Mother of God. Through You we have been reconciled. Therefore, we celebrate your entrance into the Temple of the Lord, and together with all the Angels we cry out to you, Most Pure One, singing: Rejoice, through your prayers we shall be saved." (Stichera of Vespers)

The temple of the Lord, the angels and men rejoice at Mary's entrance into the temple: "Today the God-containing temple, the Mother of God, is being brought into the Temple



and Zachary receives her. Today the holy of holies rejoices, and the choir of angels mystically exult. Today celebrating with them, we cry with Gabriel: Rejoice, Full of grace, the Lord is with you, possessor of great mercy." (Stichera of Vespers)

On the occasion of this extraordinary feast of the Mother of God, holy Church calls upon all the faithful to take part in the festal joy: "Come all you faithful," we sing in the sticheras of the Lytiya, "let us extol the one and only immaculate One, preached by the prophets and presented in the Temple, chosen before all ages as the Mother, who now has become the Mother of God. O Lord, through Her prayers, grant us Your peace and great mercy."

### **The Spiritual Significance of the Feast**

What does the feast of the Entrance convey to us? What spiritual lesson does it offer us? First of all, it speaks to us of the joyful sacrifice of Joachim and Anna. They themselves bring their daughter to the Temple and offer her to the service of God. In the canon of Matins of this feast in the eighth Ode we read: "Anna, when bringing the Most Pure Temple (that is Mary) into the house of God, exclaimed to the priest: Today, receive the child given to me by God, take her into the Temple



*St. George's Cathedral in Kyiv (1744-70)*

of your Creator and joyfully sing to Him: all you bless the works of the Lord.'"

But not only do the parents joyfully bring their child to offer her to the service of God; Mary also gladly obeys the voice of God and of her parents. Like Joachim and Anna, Mary too is a very beautiful example for us of joyful sacrifice and service to God.

Perhaps today, more than ever before, the entire Church of Christ, our Church included, is suffering from a great dearth of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. The spirit of materialism and secularism is invading our families more and more, and we have fewer and fewer youths willing to sacrifice and dedicate themselves to the service of God, their Church and their nation. There are fewer and fewer parents among our people who, like St. Anna, are ready to say to our Church: "Receive the child given to me by God."

A sign of deep piety of a nation is not only its magnificent and numerous churches and monasteries but, above all, its numerous vocations — its priests, missionaries, monks and nuns. The most beautiful churches and gilded altars will be of no help to us if we do not have priests to offer the Unbloody Sacrifice, administer the Holy Sacraments, and preach the word of God in those churches. The Servant of God Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky says: "You must understand that the nation also needs zealous and holy priests to bring salvation." The lack of religious vocations among a people must lead to a gradual dying of the Church and of the spiritual life of its faithful, for the religious state is the heart and soul of the Church.

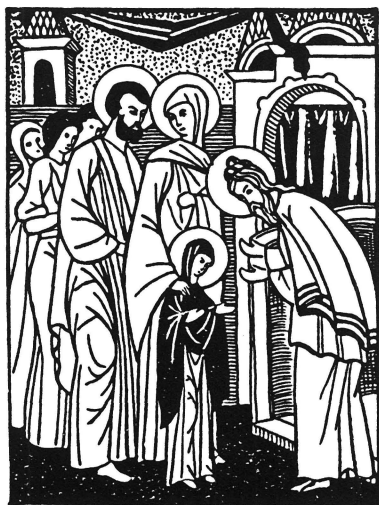
Where are we to look for the solution to such a burning problem? Where are religious vocations nurtured? The best garden where vocations to the priesthood or religious state grow and mature is a good Christian home. "A good Christian home," says the German Cardinal M. Faulhaber, "is the first spiritual seminary." Holy Church frequently calls the home the cradle of vocations. Statistics show that fifty percent of the religious vocations arise between the ages of six and fourteen, that is, during that time of life when the child is still under the full influence of its parents.

The spirit of sacrifice in the family in relation to God and one's Church is a very important factor in fostering vocations. Without the spirit of sacrifice, there is no pursuit of ideals, for

sacrifice is the language of love. Consequently, parents should prepare their children from the very cradle for sacrifice and dedication.

Unfortunately, however, there are few such Christian parents today who strive to cultivate the spirit of sacrifice and the ideal of a religious vocation in the home. On the contrary, among our faithful there are many parents who suppress the first signs of a vocation in the hearts of their children.

To a very great degree, the future of our Church and nation depends upon how our Ukrainian parents educate their children. We need parents who, following the example of SS. Joachim and Anna, would gladly offer their children as a "burnt" offering to God, their Church and their nation. We need youth with ideals, who like the model of the Most Pure Virgin Mary, would gladly follow the voice of God and dedicate themselves to the service of God, the Church and the nation. Only then will we be able to look forward to a brighter and happier future for our Church and our nation.



# The Feast of St. Nicholas

*"We praise you, O bishop of Christ,  
Nicholas, and we venerate your  
memory, for you pray for us to Christ  
our God." (Hymn of Praise of the Feast)*

Among the various feasts of the Saints whose memory we commemorate during the Church Year, St. Nicholas merits special consideration. From earliest times our holy Father, St. Nicholas, enjoyed great veneration and universal respect among our people. Not a single home in our native land was without an icon of St. Nicholas, and his icon is almost always seen among the icons on the iconostases of our churches. Our people venerate him as though he were a native Saint.

Although over one thousand five hundred years have passed since his death, because of his works of charity and merciful generosity, he continues to live in the hearts of millions of people. Every year on his feastday, his love of neighbor continues to live symbolically throughout the world, as thousands upon thousands of children receive gifts in his name. The secret of his great and continuous cult among all the Christian nations lies in the fact that he has become a symbol of sacrificial love and compassionate mercy. This is attested by the history of his cult, our church services and the fervent veneration of his icons.

## 1. The Cult of his Person

We do not know very much about the life of St. Nicholas, and what we do know is somewhat embellished with various legends. We know for certain that St. Nicholas was a bishop for many years in Myra, a city in the province of Lycia, in Asia Minor; that he took part in the First Ecumenical Council in 325 at Nicea; and that he died around the year 345. His whole life was dedicated to works of mercy, both corporal and spiritual.

Even during his lifetime he was called the father of orphans, widows, and the poor. After his death, the Lord glorified him with the gift of working miracles, for which he received the title "Great Wonder-worker". His celebrated miracles were the chief reason for the rapid spread of his cult.

The cult of St. Nicholas began to grow when the Emperor Justinian I (527-565) built a church in his honor in Constantinople. In the Jerusalem Canonarium of the seventh century, under the day of the 6th of December, it is stated: "Commemoration of Nicholas, Bishop of a great city". All the Greek menologies of the ninth century have his feast. Emperor Manuel Comnen (1143-1181), prescribed by civil legislation that the feast of St. Nicholas be celebrated on the 6th of December. From Byzantium his cult spread throughout the entire world. The oldest biography of St. Nicholas comes from the ninth century.

In the West, Pope Nicholas (858-867) — the first Pope bearing this name — erected a church in Rome in honor of St. Nicholas around the year 860. His cult was introduced into Germany by the Princess Theophano, wife of Emperor Otto II (973-983). The Latin Church also celebrates the feast of St. Nicholas on the 6th of December. In France and Germany over two thousand churches are dedicated to his name; an additional four hundred such churches are found in England.

The cult of St. Nicholas came to our native Ukraine along with the Christian faith. In the second half of the eleventh century, a church was built in Kiev in honor of St. Nicholas, over the grave of Askold. In Kiev there was a convent (monastery for women) under the patronage of St. Nicholas, founded by the wife of Prince Iziaslav Sviatoslavych (†1078). The mother of St. Theodosius Pechersky received the monastic tonsure in that monastery. In our native land, there were numerous churches in honor of St. Nicholas. The Church of St. Nicholas in Lviv, which dates back to the thirteenth century, is one of the oldest. Our Ukrainian Encyclopedia says the following about the veneration of St. Nicholas among our people: "In a great number of oral traditions, Nicholas protects people from disasters caused by the elements; mostly he protects those who sail on the sea. Hence, the Black Sea fishermen, when going out to fish, take the icon of St. Nicholas with them. In ancient times, St. Nicholas was also a protector from the dangers of the steppes. Songs about St.

Nicholas are among the earliest examples of Ukrainian poetry and include such popular ones as "O Whoever, whoever loves St. Nicholas..." (Vol. 4, p. 1533)

## **2. Cult of the Relics of St. Nicholas**

A very significant factor which contributed to the spread of the cult of St. Nicholas, especially in Italy and in the West, as well as among our people, was the translation of the relics of St. Nicholas, from Myra in Lycia, Asia Minor, to the city of Bari in southern Italy toward the end of the eleventh century.

In the second half of the eleventh century, the Moham-medans occupied Asia Minor and the city where the relics of St. Nicholas were preserved. The Italian merchants of Bari regarded St. Nicholas as a great Saint and protector of seamen. While trading with Asia Minor, they decided they would steal the relics of St. Nicholas and carry them off to Italy. The stolen relics of the Saint reached Bari on the 9th of May, 1087. As a result, great miracles began to take place immediately. For this reason, in 1089 Pope Urban II instituted the feast of the translation of the relics of St. Nicholas and ordered it to be celebrated on the 9th of May. Three years later a magnificent church was built there and his relics were deposited in it. The city of Bari became a great and famous place for pilgrimages.

Not long after the relics were transferred to Bari, the feast of the translation of the relics of St. Nicholas was also established on the 9th of May in Rus-Ukraine. Hence, our people speak of the cold and warm Nicholas. The institution of this feast has been ascribed to the Metropolitan of Pereyaslav, Ephrem. He is also said to have described the event of the translation of the relics and to have composed the service of the translation and an akathistos in honor of St. Nicholas. In regard to the institution of the feast in Ukraine, our historian M. Chubatyj writes: "It is most strange that this feast, instituted by the Pope, was a feast of joy in the West, but one of sadness in the East, especially in the Byzantine Church, for around the year 1090-1091 it was introduced into the Kievan metropolitan Church province. This feast does not exist in any other part of the Eastern Church, only in the territory of the ancient Kievan Metropolia — and to this day, it exists not only in Ukraine, but also in Muscovy and Bielorus". (History of Christianity in Rus-Ukraine, Vol. I, p. 416)



*Icon of St. Nicholas (15th c.)*

### **3. The Cult of the Icons of St. Nicholas**

Closely connected with the cult of St. Nicholas in Rus-Ukraine is the veneration of his icons. In number they occupy first place next to the icons of the Mother of God among our people. Some of these icons were famous for their miracles. Here, we would like to mention a few miraculous icons of St. Nicholas from the time of the Kievan Princes.

In the Cathedral Church of St. Sophia in Kiev, there is an icon of St. Nicholas, so-called, "the Wet". This icon became famous around 1090-1100 because of a special miracle. A man with his wife and small son were returning from a feastday celebration in Vyshhorod, and were on their way to Kiev

travelling along the Dnieper River by boat. Suddenly a storm broke out and the boy fell out of the boat into the Dnieper. Several days later, they found him alive and healthy, but only wet, at the foot of the said icon of St. Nicholas. The icon received its name from this incident.

In the Cathedral Church of St. Nicholas, in Novhorod, there is a copy of the above mentioned icon. Tradition says that it was found in the Ilmen Lake at the time Prince Mstyslav Volodymyrovych of Novhorod sent emissaries to Kiev to bring back the icon of St. Nicholas the Wet because of a vision he had in a dream. He wanted to have a copy of this icon made for the Cathedral which he built in honor of St. Nicholas, in 1113. The Ipatian Chronicle (c.1227) speaks of a miraculous icon of St. Nicholas in the town of Zhydychn, in Volyn, before which our princes came to pray.

At one time the Rumanian Catholic Church decreed that in every church there should be an icon of St. Nicholas.

### **The Cult of St. Nicholas in Our Church Services**

In our Church, St. Nicholas not only has two separate feasts in his honor, but every Thursday is also dedicated to his name. Like the church services of the two feasts, the weekly service is a faithful reflection of the cult of St. Nicholas in the Eastern Church and among our people. In this weekly service, the deep faith, eminent virtues, numerous works of mercy, various miracles, and effective intercession of St. Nicholas before God are praised. Here he is extolled as “luminary of the universe”, “compassionate lover of goodness”, “a zealous rescuer and veritable protector”, “the ornament of the Church”, “goodness of bishops”, “praise of the monks”, “a great defender”, “very merciful”, “protector, defender and consoler of all the afflicted”, “the guardian of orphans and widows.”

He assists in every necessity. At the sticheras of the Praises in Matins of the 6th of December we sing: “Having gathered together let us extol: the sick — the physician; those in distress — the rescuer; sinners — the defender; the poor — the treasure; the suffering — the consoler; travellers — a fellow-traveller; those who sail — the helmsman; him who everywhere warmly responds to all...” In the fifth Ode of the canon in the Matins service of the Translation of the Relics of



St. Nicholas, we read: "Hope of all Christians, great defender of the wronged, physician of the sick, comforter of the distressed, intercessor of all before God, obtain for us peace and save us from the incursion of enemies."



*St. Nicholas Cathedral, Chicago, Ill.*

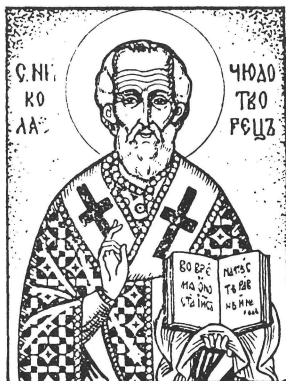
The intercession of St. Nicholas is powerful before God. In the Vespers service of the feast of the translation of his relics, we sing: "Having come together, you lovers of feasts, let us joyfully celebrate with songs the holy translation of our protector, for he illumines all nations with miracles, devoutly consoles sufferers, comes to the rescue of the wronged, by his almsgiving he makes God his debtor and, therefore, he receives a hundredfold reward. We all cry to him: Pray, (O bishop), O hierarch Nicholas to the Saviour of all, that He

grant peace to the world and save our souls.” In the eighth Ode of the canon of the Matins of the feast of the translation of the relics, we read: “To you God has given great authority and power, O Nicholas, the sea submits to you, the air obeys you, nations subject themselves to you, seeing your most glorious miracles.”

Our holy Father Nicholas gives us a beautiful example of a living, active, and sacrificial love of God and neighbor. His love of neighbor is universal, all-embracing, full of mercy and ready to assist in every necessity of soul and body.

On the significance of almsgiving, St. John Chrysostom wrote: “Almsgiving is the queen of virtues. It raises man very quickly to the heavenly mansions. It is the most effective defender. Great is almsgiving...It pierces the air, soars beyond the moon, rises above the rays of the sun and reaches the very heavens. And even there it does not stop, but on the contrary, it penetrates heaven, circles around the assemblies of angels and all the higher powers and stands before the very throne of the King...Give bread and receive paradise, exchange the small for the large, the mortal for the immortal, corruption for incorruption. (Sermon on Repentance)

St. Nicholas saw Jesus Christ in his neighbor and that is why he quickly and generously hastened to help him in every need. The Holy Gospel says that at the Last Judgment the Lord will judge us by our works of love and mercy. Christ assures us of this when He says: “Amen I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of My brethren, you did it for Me.” (Matthew 25,40)



# **The Feast of the Conception of St. Ann**

*“Today the universe celebrates the  
Conception of Anna, which is brought  
about by God.” (The Kontakion of  
the Feast)*

The very ancient and profound cult of the Most Holy Mother of God, a characteristic mark of the Eastern Church, is especially manifested in the great wealth of Marian feasts in the Liturgical Year. These feasts present to us the more important moments in the life of the Mother of God, from the moment of her immaculate Conception to the moment of her glorious Dormition (Assumption into Heaven).

The Holy Gospel does not give much information about the life of the Most Pure Virgin Mary, hence, it is not strange that the feasts of our Blessed Mother in general do not have their basis in the events of the Gospels, but rather in Christian tradition and in the narratives (accounts) given in the Apocryphal books of the first centuries. One such feast is that of the Conception of St. Ann, which our Church celebrates on the 9th of December. Let us consider the history of this feast as it developed both in the East and in the West and in our Church.

## **The Feast of the Conception of St. Ann in the East**

First mention of this feast was made in the Typicon of St. Sabbas of the fifth century, but it did not begin to develop and spread until the eighth century. During this time, St. Andrew of Crete composed a liturgy for this feast; George of Nicomedia and John of Eubeia extol it in their sermons. By the ninth century this feast had spread throughout the entire

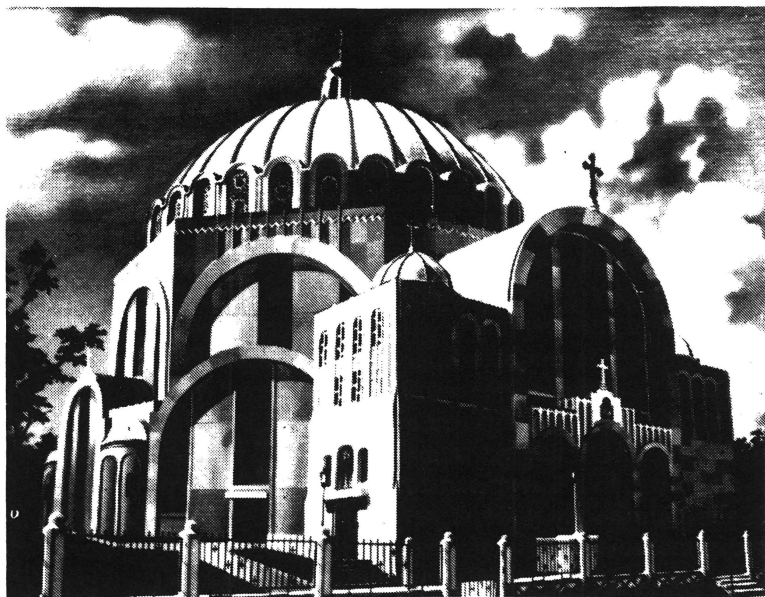
Byzantine empire; now it is celebrated in all the Eastern Churches.

The feast of the Conception of St. Ann in ancient times was known by several different names. One of the oldest is "The Annunciation of the Conception of the Holy Mother of God". In the constitution on feasts, Emperor Manuel Comnen (1143-1181) calls this feast the "Conception of our Most Holy Mother of God". The Slavonic Typicons generally refer to it as the "Conception of Blessed Ann" or "The Conception of Holy Ann, when she conceived the Most Holy Mother of God". In our Ukrainian Catholic Church the Synod of Lviv gave this feast the official title "The Immaculate Conception of the Most Pure Virgin Mary". However, the Roman revision of our liturgical books restored the pristine title of the feast — "The Conception of Holy Anna, when She conceived the Most Holy Mother of God".

The main theme of the liturgy of this feast, according to the Apocrypha, was the miraculous event when Anna conceived the Most Holy Mother of God. This liturgy describes the grief and distress Joachim and Anna experienced because of their childlessness, and presents the fervent prayer of Anna: "O Lord God of the heavenly Powers," prays St. Ann, "You know the shame of childlessness, therefore, heal the pain of my heart and make this barren one fruitful..." (Stichera of the Vespers service of the Feast). In response to her fervent supplication, an angel appears and announces the conception of the Most Pure Virgin Mary. "Your supplication," says the angel, "has reached the Lord. Do not be sad, and cease weeping, for you shall become a fruitful olive tree, bringing forth a young shoot — a wonderful maiden, who will bring forth a flower — the Christ in the flesh, who will grant great mercy to the world." (Ibidem) At the moment of her conception, the womb of St. Ann becomes like a heaven... "A new heaven is being formed in the womb of Anna," says the Sessional Hymn in Matins, "at the command of the Almighty God; from it shines forth the never-setting Sun, illumining the whole universe with the rays of the Divinity, with the great riches of goodness, the one and only Lover of Mankind."

Her parents rejoice over the wonderful conception of the Most Holy Mother of God; the prophets rejoice; heaven and earth rejoice. The Church calls upon the Old and New Testaments to join in the rejoicing: "Come, people of all

classes and ages," we sing in the sticheras of the Praises in Matins, "let us celebrate with the Angels the all-glorious conception of the Mother of God; patriarchs sing praises to the Mother of the King of all; you, prophets, praise her whom you preached; you, forefathers, praise your descendant — the Mother of God; you aged, praise the ancestor of God; you, faithful, praise the root of your faith; you, priests, praise the all-holy temple of God; you, choirs of saints, praise the cause of your assembly; you, armies of angels, praise the Mother of the Lord of all creation, and Saviour of our souls."



*Immaculate Conception Ukrainian Catholic Church.  
Philadelphia, Pa.*

In the service of the Conception of St. Ann the holiness and purity of the Most Holy Virgin Mary is praised: "Choirs of prophets," says the Sessional Hymn of Matins, "in times past preached the immaculate, pure, and divine maiden and Virgin, whom Ann conceived, who until then had been barren and childless. We, who have been saved because of her, let us extol her today with hearts filled with joy as the one and only Immaculate One."

The canon of Matins which was composed by St. Andrew of Crete is a most beautiful hymn in honor of the Conception

of the Mother of God. She is the "Undefiled Ark", the "pure dove", "the star of divine grace", "divine temple of the Master", "royal porphyry", "fragrant myrrh", "burning bush", "immaculate dove", "holy sceptre, the New Testament and urn containing the manna", "unconsumed bush", "golden candlestick", "living chamber of the Lord God", "living fountain", "holy temple".

Today we celebrate her immaculate conception whereas nine months later on the 8th of September she appears among us in her glorious Nativity.

### **The Feast of the Conception of Holy Ann in the West**

Somewhere around the tenth century this feast spread from the East to England. During the reform of the Anglo-Saxon Church under William the Conqueror (1066-1087) it was abolished, and then restored again in 1125.

In the West, the feast of the Conception of St. Ann underwent a great evolution. The East directed its attention mainly to the miraculous fact of the conception by old and barren parents, while the West in this feast stressed, not so much the fact as the manner of this conception. Thus there slowly emerged the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, which teaches that the Most Pure Virgin Mary was free from original sin from the very first moment of her conception. The theologians of the thirteenth century argued heatedly about this teaching; some, under the leadership of John Duns Scotus (†1308), defended this doctrine, while others under the leadership of St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) disputed it. In later times, most theologians in the West defended the Immaculate Conception. Pope Sixtus IV, in 1476, introduced the feast of the Immaculate Conception in Rome, while Clement XI, in 1708, extended it to the entire Catholic Church.

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God reached its peak and triumph during the reign of Pope Pius IX (1846-1878), who by his Bull of the 8th of December, 1854, proclaimed the Immaculate Conception a dogma of faith. In this Bull it was declared "that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted to her by almighty God through



*The traditional Ukrainian wooden church of the Immaculate Conception, Barnesboro, Pa.*

the merits of Christ Jesus, Saviour of mankind, was preserved from all stain of original sin — this is a doctrine revealed by God and, therefore, must be held firmly and constantly by all faithful Christians.” Four years later on the 25th of March, 1858, the Most Pure Virgin Mary, in her apparition to St. Bernadette Soubirou, when asked what her name was, declared to the whole world: “I am the Immaculate Conception.” The Latin Church celebrates this feast on the 8th of December.

### **Feast of the Conception of St. Ann in Our Church**

Although the Eastern Orthodox Churches do not formally accept the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, nevertheless, in practice they, too, believe and profess this dogma. A whole procession of holy Fathers of the Eastern Church, beginning with St. Ephrem the Syrian, either allude to or explicitly express their faith in the Immaculateness of the Most Holy Mother of God. In his Nisibian Hymns St. Ephrem the Syrian says: “You, O Lord, and your Mother, are alone in

every respect holy, for there is neither in You, O Lord, nor in Your Mother any stain of sin." Faith in the Immaculate Conception is revealed in the doctrine of St. Sophronius of Jerusalem, St. Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople and St. John Damascene. The latter, in his sermon on the Dormition of the Mother of God says: "Your immaculate body which was preserved from all stain did not remain in the earth." In our services we have numerous expressions pertaining to the immaculateness and the all-holiness of the Mother of God. A very beautiful prayer to the Mother of God which concludes the Small Compline service, ascribed to St. Ephrem, begins with the words: "Undefiled, immaculate, incorrupt, Most Pure Virgin, Divine Maiden and Queen..."

A whole gamut of Ukrainian theologians of the Kievan School of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries taught and defended the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Lazar Baranovych (†1694), once the rector of the Kieven-Mohylian Academy and later the Bishop of Chernihiv, said: "We all can truly say: 'For behold in guilt I was born; in sin my mother conceived me.' But you are the only one to whom these words do not apply, for you were not conceived in sin nor were you born in guilt. It was clearly imperative that you be conceived without sin, for you had to receive Him, who was to free the world from sin and destroy all iniquity." (Sermons for the great Feasts). Joanicus Galiatowskyj (†1688), rector of the Kievan-Mohylian Academy, in his second sermon on the Nativity of the Most Pure Virgin Mary, recalling her various prefigurements in the Old Testament and commenting on her privileges, says: "The third great privilege which God bestowed upon the Most Pure Virgin is that He preserved her from original sin, for the Most Pure Virgin Mary was conceived and born without original sin...on the soul of the Most Pure Virgin there was no original sin, but the grace of God. For this reason, the angel Gabriel said to her: 'Hail, full of grace the Lord is with you.' These words of the angel enable us to understand the immaculate conception of the Most Pure Virgin. When a container is filled with oil, nothing can be added to it, not water, nor anything else for that matter, for there is simply no room. So too, in the Most Pure Virgin there is no room either for original sin or for any other kind of sin, for she is full of God's grace." (Key to Understanding)

At their Chapter in Zhyrovyci, 1661, the Basilian Order



decided to extend throughout the entire Order the celebration of the feast of the Immaculate Conception to eight days instead of one. This decision was made in thanksgiving to the Most Holy Mother of God for her special protection of the Uniate Church.



*By Christine Dochwat*

The Ukrainian Catholic Church in Galicia, after the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, began to call the feast of the Conception of St. Ann "the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Mother of God." The Synod of Lviv (1891), places the feast of the Immaculate Conception among the Marian feasts and orders that it be celebrated after

the manner of the great Marian feasts, with a one day pre-feast and a seven day post-feast. The Synod also approved the service of the Immaculate Conception, which was composed by Father Isidor Dolnytskyj, and directed that it be used in all the churches. The older service of the Conception of St. Ann was made the pre-feast of the Immaculate Conception.

How wonderfully and marvellously God prepared her who was to be the Mother of our Saviour. She — full of grace, holy, most pure and immaculate — became the worthy tabernacle, in which the Son of God dwelt. Our ancient Slavonic Prologue contains the following instruction for the feast of the Conception of St. Ann: “Beloved, today is the beginning of our salvation. In the womb of the righteous Ann, after the annunciation of the angel, the grand-daughter of the Just Jesse, of the line of David, is conceived... And know beloved, that today we are celebrating the Conception of our Lady the Most Pure Queen — the God-bearer, Mother of God. Therefore, let us hasten to her church with joy, and remain there in awesome prayer; with a vigil let us open the doors of the heavenly chamber, and let us beautify ourselves with prayer, alms and fasting. Thus let us celebrate the holy Conception of the Most Pure Lady the Mother of God devoutly and with joy, for She unceasingly prays to her Son and our God for us.”



# Christmas Eve

*"The time of our salvation has arrived.  
Prepare yourself, O Manger, for the  
Virgin is on her way to give birth."  
(Stichera of the Eve of Christmas)*

The feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ is ranked among the greatest feasts of our Church Year. Therefore, holy Church, mindful of the majesty and significance of this feast, encourages the faithful to prepare by prayer and fasting for this encounter with our Saviour. The Pylypiwka (Philip's Fast), the pre-festal services, and the celebrations on the Eve of the Nativity serve this purpose. The closer we approach to the Feast of the Nativity, the more and more frequently in the sticheras, canons and troparions of our services, the manger in Bethlehem, where the Son God was to be born, his Most Holy Mother Mary, St. Joseph, her Spouse, the cave, the star, the angels and the other accompaniments of His birth, are mentioned.

This festal preparation reaches its peak on the Eve of the Nativity. It is a day of watching, prayer and fasting. The guest from heaven is about to arrive, therefore, it is necessary to prepare for his coming worthily. The Holy Eve of the Nativity has not only its own church significant services; it is also rich in symbolic rites and customs, some of which go back to pre-Christian times.

## The Spirit of the Holy Eve Services

The celebration of the Eve of the Nativity of our Lord dates from the first centuries of Christianity. As early as the fourth century, there was a church rule which specified how the Eve was to be celebrated when it falls on a Sunday. In the fifth century, Synesius, Bishop of Ptolemais, and in the sixth century, St. Gregory the Great, preached sermons on the Eve

of the Nativity. The Christmas Eve service is a faithful reflection of the spirit in which holy Church goes forth to meet her Saviour. This is the spirit that glorifies God's plans regarding the redemption of the human race; a spirit of wonderment at the love and sacrifice of the Incarnate Word of God; the spirit of adoration and devotion toward the Divine Child and finally, the spirit of unearthly spiritual joy that the time of our salvation has arrived. The best expression of this spirit are the sticheras and canons of the Christmas Eve services. In the third Ode of the canon of Matins we read: "Today earth has become a heaven for me, for on it the Creator is born and is placed in the manger in Bethlehem of Judea. The shepherds sing unceasingly with the angels: 'Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth...'" The Exapostilarion in Matins calls upon us to worship the newly-born Messiah: "With great haste let us go to Bethlehem, to worship him with the Magi, bearing the fruits of good deeds as gifts." The stichera in the Ninth Hour service says: "Today He Who holds in His hand all creation is born of the Virgin; He, Who by nature is inaccessible, is wrapped in swaddling clothes like a human being. In the manger lies One, Who, in the beginning, created the heavens by His word. He, Who sent down manna to the people in the desert, is nourished at the breast of a Virgin. The Bridegroom of the Church invokes the Magi, and from them, the Son of the Virgin receives gifts. We worship your Nativity, O Christ; we worship your Nativity, O Christ; we worship your Nativity, O Christ; grant that we may also see your divine Theophany."

The Eve of the feast of the Nativity has a special liturgy called the Great or Royal Hours. The Patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius (c.†641), is believed to have composed it. The Royal Hours are celebrated three times a year: on the Eve of the Nativity, on the Eve of the Theophany (Epiphany) and on Great Friday. The Royal Hours before the Nativity of our Lord are so composed that in their Psalms and in the readings of the prophets of the Old Testament are collected the main prophecies relating to the promised Messiah. The events connected with the Nativity of the Lord are read from the Gospel, while the sticheras sing the praises of the Incarnate Son of God and relate the place and circumstances surrounding the Nativity. During the service of the Royal Hours, the Holy Gospel Book is placed on the tetrapod; it remains there as a symbol of Christ who has already arrived and is now



*Our Lady of Vyshorod (12th c.)*

preaching his divine doctrine. The Holy Hours received its name from the fact that in Byzantium, the emperors, along with their court, were always present at this service. At the end of the service the polychronion was sung in their honor.

## **The Spiritual Preparation at Home**

The eve of Christmas brings the Forty Days Christmas fast to a close. A strict fast is prescribed for this entire day. The whole family feels that on that day a very important heavenly guest will arrive in the evening, and therefore, a deeply festal and spiritual mood pervades the home. Our ancestors highly respected and zealously observed the fast of this day until the appearance of the evening star. Kievan Metropolitan, Maxim (1283-1305), in his rules on fasting says, that even if it be Saturday or Sunday on which the Eve of the Nativity falls, on that day a strict fast must be kept. Only after the Vespers service is one allowed to strengthen oneself with bread and wine. He orders that the same kind of fast be observed also on the Eve of the Theophany.

From earliest times, besides fasting, our ancestors prepared themselves for the feast of the Nativity of our Lord with confession and Holy Communion. This very beautiful and holy tradition comes from the first centuries of Christianity in Ukraine; it began with the Kievan Metropolitan George (1072). This holy practice was prescribed by Metropolitan Peter Mohyla, in his Euchologion, and also by the Synods of Zamost and Lviv.

An old Slavonic Prologue for the 24th of December contains the following spiritual exhortation to the faithful in reference to greeting the feast of the Nativity of Christ: "Take note brethren, that there is a fast on the day before this feast of the Nativity of Christ. Therefore, on this day, at the Sixth Hour (12 o'clock noon), we gather together for prayer, with love and purity, overcoming anger, purifying carnal desires, and renouncing all evil deeds so that we may be made worthy with pure lips and an undefiled heart to partake of the Body of the Lord, that same Body which the Lord took upon Himself and willingly became poor."

## **The Rites and Customs of Christmas Eve**

In pre-Christian times, our ancestors, at the same time in which the Nativity of Christ is now celebrated, kept the feast of "Korochun" — the day of greeting the sun. "The feast of 'Korochun'," says Professor S. Kylymnyk, "is altogether an agricultural feast. In those remote times, this feast com-



*By Peter Andrusiw*

memorated the impulse of human inspiration, hope and faith in the prospect of a good harvest, a new increase in cattle, continued health and well-being, and a happy life for the farmer... Today, the feast of "Korochun" with its manifold rites, celebrations, prayers and rituals — is clearly reflected in our feast of the Nativity of Christ... The feast "Korochun" of Rus-Ukraine, which was replaced by the Holy Nativity is singularly rich, happy, joyful and a great feast. It differs from similar feasts of other nations in its special rituals, in its

wealth of folklore, in its originality of ethnography, and in its very firm preservation of our ancient prehistoric culture by the ethnic masses. This feast is the document of our profound prehistoric reality, not only of belief and world outlook, but also of our cultural, political and economic ties and relations with the world as a whole... Our Church adopted these beautiful customs — remnants of a primitive culture — but invested all these with Christian ideals, morals, and virtues, such as truth, love, forgiveness, generosity and spiritual perfection... But the basis of all the Christmas customs are those which were associated in remote times with agricultural and the pastoral life. These have been preserved to the present day and include all the characteristic features of the Ukrainian people: industry, hospitality, honesty, goodness, a love for singing, unity and reverence for the sanctity of the family life; respect for the memory of the departed, etc.” (The Ukrainian Folk Year from the Historical Perspective ... Vol. I, pp. 13-14)

The main duty of the members of each family on Holy Eve (Christmas Eve) is to prepare themselves, their house and farm for the feast of the Nativity of the Lord. The housewife is occupied with putting the house in order so that it will look beautiful, and with giving it a festive look. She spends most of her time in preparing Holy Supper. This Supper, though meatless, is rich, for it includes as many as twelve traditional courses. Hence, its name “bahata kutya” (bahata — rich; kutya — boiled wheat mixed with honey).

Why are twelve courses served at the Holy Supper? We find the answer to this question in the above-mentioned work of Professor S. Kylymnyk. “On the basis of profound research,” he says, “it may be said that twelve courses are served at Holy Eve Supper because throughout the course of the year the moon circles the earth twelve times. Thus, each course represents a single month. Secondly, the “Bahata Kutya” consists of every kind of vegetable and fruit that is on the farm, so that, with all this, the family could receive the god of the harvest and the holy souls of the ancestors... And the ancestors, in turn, partaking of all this food, give that year still a greater harvest.” (p. 20-21)

Among the courses of Holy Supper, “kutya” or “kolyvo” is the most important. This is boiled wheat with honey. There are those who are of the opinion that “kutya” is a remnant of



the ancient love banquets (agapes), which were prepared on the day of the death of a Martyr or deceased beloved. Wheat, as a seed, revives each year; hence, it is the symbol of eternity, and honey is the symbol of the eternal happiness of the Saints in heaven.

While the housewife is busy preparing food and decorating, the husband is occupied putting his farm in order, and waters and feeds the cattle. With the approach of evening, in a special ceremony, he brings a sheaf of straw (called *Didukh*) into the house, and places it in the corner by the dining table. "The *Didukh-Raj*," says Professor S. Kylymnyk, "in addition to symbolizing the presence of the spirits of the ancestors and the god of the harvest, also symbolizes the harvest of the new year, prosperity, affluence and human destiny... Hence, great respect is shown the *Didukh*; it is brought into the house with the same piety and reverence and ceremony with which it was brought from the field, and it is given a place of honor in the house. (op. cit., p. 24)

Straw and hay are also brought into the house. The hay is placed under the tablecloth while the straw is placed on the floor. In certain localities, this straw was also called "didukh". All this takes place according to a prescribed rite which includes speeches, well-wishings and appropriate chants. Various agricultural tools, such as an axe, a scythe, sickle, etc. are placed under the table, to indicate that God's blessing is desired on all the work of the farm.

Holy Supper is now prepared. As soon as the evening star appears in the sky, the head of the house lights a candle on the table. The whole family, dressed in festive attire, prays together and then sits down to the Holy Supper. The father then extends good wishes to the entire family, and they begin the Supper with "kutya", accompanied by various ceremonies and incantations. During the Holy Supper, the souls of the departed of the family are remembered, and a separate dish with "kutya" is set for them on the table or window sill, for it is believed that the departed souls also share in the Holy Supper. After supper, the whole family greets the Nativity of our Lord by singing carols and exchanging gifts.

"The mood of Holy Supper," says Father Marko Dyrda, O.S.B.M., "fills the heart and soul of everyone with the unspeakable charm of the very ancient customs of the Ukrainian people... Within the soul of every Ukrainian, the Holy Sup-

per arouses not only a pleasant and stirring memory, but also unites his thoughts, intentions and endeavours with the ideal of the whole Ukrainian people in the homeland as well as those Ukrainians in the diaspora scattered in different countries throughout the world. Therefore, by your participation in the Christmas celebrations, renew in yourselves the sense of belonging to your people; strengthen your awareness of your national identity in the Ukrainian community, in which you live now in a free country; realize that you are a member of the Ukrainian nation, which developed its own customs and its own spiritual culture during the period of a thousand years. You should live by these customs, cultivate them among yourselves, and constantly recall them, so that in this way you may strengthen your ties with your ancestral origin. For this reason, the Holy Supper is a rich and profound experience that will never be forgotten by the Ukrainian people.” (God, the Church and Youth, p. 31-32)



# **The Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord**

*"We extol you, O life-giving Christ,  
who for our sake today is born in the  
flesh of the Immaculate and Most Pure  
Virgin Mary." (Hymn of Praise of the Feast)*

On December 20, 386 or 388, St. John Chrysostom in a sermon on the anniversary of the death of the Martyr, Philogonius, Bishop of Antioch, announced to his faithful that in this year for the first time Antioch will be celebrating the feast of the Nativity of our Lord on the 25th of December, independently of the feast of the Theophany. He also added that this feast "can without mistake be called the mother of all the feasts", for, "from it," he goes on to say, "the Theophany, the holy Pasch, the Ascension and the Pentecost have their origin and foundation. If Christ had not been born in the flesh, neither could he have been baptized, and we would not have Theophany; had he not been crucified — we would not have the Pasch; had he not sent the Holy Spirit — we would not have Pentecost. Thus, from the Nativity of Christ, all the other feasts flow like different streams from the same source. This feast justly occupies first place not only because of this, but also because the event which this day commemorates is, of all events, the most worthy of wonder."

Truly, Christ's Nativity is the most significant event in the history of the human race. This event inaugurated the Christian Era and became the point of reference from which we date the events of world history.

## **The Nativity of the Lord in the First Centuries**

For the first three centuries, the Christians did not have a separate feast of the Nativity of Christ. At that time the only

feast known was the Theophany, which was celebrated on the 6th of January. This feast included the Nativity of the Lord and the Baptism of Christ in the River Jordan. In the first centuries of Christianity the Greek word "Epiphany" (a manifestation) or "Theophany" (a manifestation of God), referred not only to the manifestation of Jesus Christ during his baptism, but also to his manifestation on earth, i.e., his birth, his nativity.

The ancient blending of these two feasts and their simultaneous celebration on the same day is clearly seen in their identical composition in our church service. The motif of the liturgy of these two feasts is one and the same. They both have a vigil with fasting; they both have, on this eve, the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great with Vespers, and Royal Hours, the Great Compline with the singing of the hymn "God is with us...", and in the Liturgy, they both have the hymn "As many as have been baptized..." and so forth. The difference in their services lies only in their contents.

In the first centuries the Church, especially the Western Church, blended not only the Nativity of our Lord and His Baptism with the Theophany, but also the homage of the Three Magi, the miracle in Cana of Galilee, the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, and in some places even the resurrection of Lazarus, because all these events bore testimony to the Theophany — the manifestations of God on earth. This celebration of several events from the life of Jesus Christ together with the feast of the Theophany was one of the chief reasons why the Western Church was the first to separate the feast of the Nativity of our Lord from the feast of the Theophany and why it began to celebrate this feast on a separate day.

### **The Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord in the West**

The feast of the Nativity of our Lord was first separated from the Theophany in the Roman Church, which under Pope Julius I (337-352), began to celebrate the Nativity of Christ on the 25th of December. The chronographic collection of calendars up to the year 354, which bears different names but is known by the name of the Calendar of Furius Philocalus, the chapter dealing with the dates of the death of the Martyrs,

under the 25th of December, states: "The Day of the Nativity of Christ in Bethlehem." And in another chapter there is the note: "During the consuls of Caesar Augustus and Emilius Paulus, Christ was born on the 25th of December on Friday, on the 15th day of the new moon."



*By Myron Levytsky*

What was the main motive of the Roman Church for celebrating the Nativity of our Lord on the 25th of December?

In Rome, the pagan feasts honoring the god Saturn or Chronos were held from the 17th to the 23rd of December. These celebrations were called the Saturnalia. Immediately after these feasts, on the 25th of December, followed the great joyful feasts in honor of the "Unconquered Sun", in Latin "Solis Invicti". On the 25th of December, 274, Emperor

Aurelian proclaimed the Sun-god the chief guardian of the Roman Empire and dedicated a temple to him in the Field of Mars or Mar's Field in Rome. The feast of the Sun-god was celebrated on the 25th of December because the winter solstice of the sun, during which days get longer and the sun radiates greater warmth occurred at that time. This day was regarded as the birthday of the sun and its triumph over the darkness of the night.

In the above-mentioned Calendar of Philocalus, which gives both the pagan and Christian feasts, under the 25th of December, it is also noted: "Natalis Invicti", i.e., "the Birth of the Unconquered". The term "unconquered" is the usual epithet of the gods, and in this case, the Sun-god.

Therefore, in order to counteract pagan Rome, Christian Rome substituted the Sun-god with its Christian Sun-the God-Man and dedicated the 25th of December to his birth. The holy Fathers in their Christmas sermons and our Christmas services call Christ the Sun of Truth or the Sun of Justice.

Although the Roman Church celebrated the Nativity of Christ on the 25th of December, for some time, other Churches in the West still celebrated it on the 6th of January together with the Epiphany (Theophany). During the lifetime of St. Ambrose (†397), the feast of the Nativity spread to Milan, afterwards (sometime before 384) to Spain and northern Africa, and then during the time of Bishop Perpetuus of Tours (†491) to Gaul, modern France, and to other countries of Europe.

From the moment that the day of the 25th of December became the day of the feast of the Nativity of Christ, it also slowly began to be regarded as the historical day of Christ's birth. Until that time, there were many opinions and disputes concerning the date of the birth of Jesus Christ, since the Gospel makes no mention of it.

St. Clement of Alexandria (c.†215) says that during his time, some regarded the 20th of May as the day of Christ's birth, others celebrated it on the 6th or the 10th of January, but according to him it occurred on the 18th of November. In a writing of the third-fourth century, ascribed to St. Cyprian, allusion is made to the 28th of March as the day of the birth of the Saviour. In an inscription found on the statue of St. Hippolytus of Rome (c.†235), March 25 was given as the date of Christ's Nativity. In the commentary of St. Hippolytus on the



*By Myron Levytsky*

Book of the Prophet Daniel, we have the following observation: "The first manifestation of the Lord in the flesh, when he was born in Bethlehem, occurred on Wednesday the 25th of December, in the 42nd year of Augustus, (the 5500th year from Adam.) St. Epiphanius of Cyprus (†403), in a dispute with the Alogoi (the name given to heretics who denied the divinity of Christ as the Logos), proves that Christ's birth took place on the 6th of January and His Baptism on the 8th of November.

The fixing of the date of Christ's nativity influenced the fixing of the dates of the other feasts dependent upon it, such as the Circumcision, the Presentation, the Annunciation and the Nativity of St. John the Baptist. The oldest sermon on the Nativity of our Lord is to be found in the Western Church written by Zenon of Verona (†380).

## **The Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord in the East**

Following the example of the Western Church, slowly the Eastern Churches began to celebrate the Nativity of our Lord on the 25th of December. Three great Fathers of the Eastern Church played a decisive role in this regard: St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, and St. John Chrysostom. St. Basil the Great (†379) was the first to begin to celebrate the Nativity of our Lord on the 25th of December in Cappadocia between the years 371 and 374. One sermon on the Nativity of the Lord is attributed to him. Under his influence, St. Gregory the Theologian (†390) introduced this feast in Constantinople. On the 25th of December he began his sermon with these words: "Christ is born — glorify Him! Christ has descended from heaven — greet Him! Christ has appeared on earth — praise Him!" Then he says further: "Today is the feast of the Theophany, or Nativity, as this day is also called, and both names are given to one feast, for God manifested Himself to mankind by being born in the flesh... From the word-manifestation — we have the name Theophany (manifestation of God), and from the word birth — Nativity. This is the feast we are celebrating today — the coming of God to mankind..."

St. John Chrysostom (†407) introduced the feast of Christ's Nativity with great zeal in Antioch in 386 or 388. In his sermon on the 25th of December, extolling the Nativity of Christ, he expressed his joy at its celebration: "A long time I have waited to see this day," he says, "and not only to see it but also to celebrate it with such a multitude of people. I prayed unceasingly that our gathering would be great in number as it is today, and it so happened that the prayer was fulfilled. Although ten years had not yet passed since this day became renowned and familiar to us, it seems as though it had been handed down to us from early times, so exalted has it become because of your endeavours. Therefore, he would not err who would say that this feast is both new and at the same time ancient — new, because it was not long ago that it became known to you; ancient, because it quickly achieved equality with the earliest feasts and was raised up to the same level."

In his sermon he defends the 25th of December as the real day of Christ's birth, giving as proof the very rapid spread of



this feast and the great esteem in which the faithful had held it. Proof of this is also found in the documents that were preserved in Rome concerning the census of Caesar Augustus. Finally, according to him, the fact that the conception of Jesus Christ occurred six months after the conception of John the Baptist proves that December 25 is the real date. So then if the conception of Jesus Christ occurred in March, then his nativity should fall in December.

A little later, a new feast came into practice at two other centres of the then Christian world: Alexandria and Jerusalem. Nevertheless for the longest time certain Churches in the East celebrated the Nativity of Christ together with the Theophany on the 6th of January. The Armenian Orthodox Church celebrates the Nativity of Christ and the Theophany on the 6th of January to this day. The Armenian-Uniates, under pressure from Rome, celebrate the Nativity of Christ on the 25th of December since the sixteenth century.

Later when the Nativity of Christ in the East became a separate feast, the Theophany, celebrated on January 6th, commemorated only the event of the baptism of Christ.

Roman the Melodist, Patriarch Germanus, Andrew of Crete, John Damascene, Cosmas of Maiuma and Patriarch Anatole, composed the liturgy or service for the feast of the Nativity of our Lord.

In the fourth century, St. Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine the Great, built a church in Bethlehem in honor of the Nativity of Christ. A law pertaining to the universal celebration of the feast of the Nativity of the Lord is found in Emperor Theodosius' codex of 438 and in Emperor Justinian's codex of 535.



## The Nativity of Our Lord — An Unfathomable Mystery

*“I behold a wonderful and most glorious  
mystery: the cave — is a heaven;  
the Virgin — the Throne of the Cherubim;  
the manger — the place where the uncontain-  
able Christ God was born; let us extol  
Him, singing praises to him.”  
(Canon of Christmas)*

The greatest and most profound mystery of the Christian faith is the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. The eternal God becomes a little infant and does not cease to be God. “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us” — says St. John the Evangelist (1,14). “The eternal God is born” — we sing in our Ukrainian Christmas Carol. Christ’s nativity is the cradle of our faith. Only faith is able to accept this unfathomable mystery, understand it and adore it.

In the first centuries, the holy Fathers of the Eastern Church accepted the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God with profound faith and great piety. Enraptured by this mystery, they have nothing but words of wonder for the most wonderful love of God, the sacrifice, humility, and poverty of the newly-born Messiah and Saviour. Moreover, from their lips come exclamations of heavenly joy that the time of salvation has come.

Like the holy Fathers, in her Christmas celebrations our Church also joyfully praises and glorifies the mystery of the birth of the divine Infant. For the strengthening of our faith and a better understanding of this mystery, we shall cite here portions from the Christmas sermons of the holy Fathers and from our Nativity services. Here we will direct our special attention to the greatness, majesty, and significance of Christ’s Nativity for the salvation of the human race.



*By Myron Levytsky*

### **The Majesty and Significance of the Nativity of Our Lord**

The holy Fathers first direct their special attention to the greatness of the mystery of the Nativity. In his Christmas sermon St. Basil the Great (†379) teaches us how to receive the mystery of the Incarnation: "The actual, first nativity of

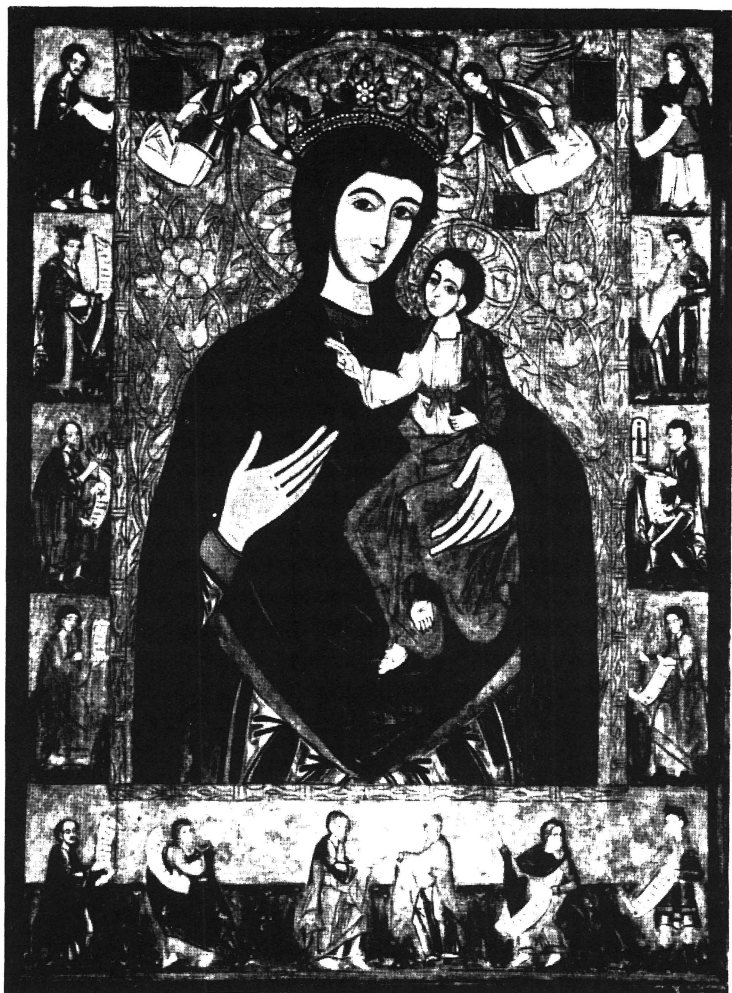
Christ, his eternal birth from all eternity in the bosom of His Father, must be venerated in silence. We should not even permit our mind to investigate this mystery. Since time and space did not yet exist, since no form of expressions had yet been created, since there is not a single eye witness, nor anyone who could describe this eternal birth, how can reason form any concept for reflection? How can the tongue give expression to thoughts that cannot be formulated? The Father was, and the Son was born! Do not say: "when?" but rather, leave that question unasked. Do not ask: "how?" for there is no answer! For the word "when" suggests time, and "how" suggests birth in the flesh...God is on earth, He is among men, not in fire nor amid the sound of trumpets; not on the smoking mountain, or in darkness, or in the terrible and roaring tempest giving the law, but manifested in the flesh, the gentle and good One dwells with those he condescends to make his equals. God is in the flesh, not operating from a distance, as did the prophets, but through his human nature, one with ours, he seeks to bring back all mankind to himself."

St. Gregory the Theologian (†390) in his word on the Nativity of Christ wonders at the mystery of the Incarnation: "The Word of God Itself, eternal, invisible, incomprehensible, incorporeal, the beginning of the beginning, light of light, the source of life and immortality, a reflection of the original beauty, an irremovable seal, an unchangeable image, decree and Word of God assuming his form, bearing a body for the sake of the body, uniting himself to a rational soul for the sake of my soul, purifying all being, the Uncreated One is created; the Uncontainable One is contained by means of a rational soul, which is the intermediary link between God and the earthly body."

St. John Chrysostom (†407) in one of his Christmas sermons extols the mystery of the Nativity of Christ in these words: "I see an extraordinary and wonderful mystery: the shepherds fill my ears with sound, singing not a song of the desert but a heavenly hymn. The angels sing, the archangels praise, the Cherubim implore, the Seraphim extol, all celebrate, seeing God on earth and man in heaven; the high — below, according to his plan; and the low — on high, according to the love of God toward man. Today Bethlehem became heaven. Instead of stars it received the singing angels, and instead of the sun it contained the unspeakable Sun of truth. Do

not ask how this can be, for whenever God wills, the order of nature yields...That the Virgin gave birth to him, that I know, and that God gave birth to him in time, that I believe, but the manner of giving birth I learned to reverence in silence..." (Works, Vol. 6, p. 692)

In another Christmas sermon he says: "Is there anything that could equal this Feast? God on earth, and man in heaven, the angels serve man, man associates with the angels and



*The Virgin Hodigitria with the Prophets, in Lemko Land.*

other heavenly Powers; the demons flee, death is conquered, paradise is opened, the curse is taken away, sin has disappeared, offenses are banished, truth comes to earth. Nature, against which the Cherubim guarded paradise, today is united with God.” (Works, Vol. 12, p. 787)

St. Athanasius the Great (†373) in his word on the Nativity of Christ says: “Even the hovel in which the Virgin gave birth, assumes the appearance of a church where the manger — is the prothesis; Joseph — the celebrant; the shepherds — the deacons; the angels — the priests; the Lord — the bishop; the Virgin — the altar; the mother’s breasts — chalices; the vestments — the incarnation; the Cherubim — the ripidions; the Holy Spirit — the discos; and the discos veil — the Father.”



St. Ephrem the Syrian (†373) sang praises to the Incarnation in very beautiful, deeply dogmatic Christmas hymns: “It was a pure night,” he says, “during which the Pure One appeared, to purify us. Let nothing become mingled with our sentiments, lest they be polluted.” (Hymn I, 82) “The day of your Nativity joined heaven and earth, for on this day the most High came to earthlings.” (Hymn IV, 14) “The Most High became a child but in him there was hidden a treasure of wisdom.” (Hymn IV, 148) “The Most High was nourished by the milk of Mary, while all creatures were being nourished by his riches.” (Hymn IV, 149)

In the Vespers service of the feast we sing in the sticheras of Lytiya: "Heaven and earth are united today because Christ is born. Today God came to earth and man ascended into heaven. Today, he who is invisible by nature became visible in the flesh for man's sake; hence, glorifying him, we cry: "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of good will..." The sticheras at the Aposticha of Vespers says: "A great and most glorious miracle took place today: A Virgin gives birth and the womb remains intact. The Word becomes incarnate but does not separate himself from the Father; the angels together with the shepherds sing praises, and we, too, together with them sing: "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth."

### **Characteristic Traits of the Incarnation**

The other aspects of the Incarnation of the Son of God that the holy Fathers admired were — sacrifice, humility and poverty: "And this shall be a sign to you," said the angels to the shepherds, "you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." (Luke 2,12) These virtues will shine forth throughout his entire life; they will accompany him to the cross and to his grave.

In his Christmas sermon St. Athanasius exclaims: "Who will not speak out, who will not wonder at the Lord's coming? In heaven he is a freeman, on earth he is a hireling; above he is rich, below he is poor. In heaven he is the divine Throne, on earth he is in the cave; in heaven he is in the unfathomable bosom of the Father, on earth he is in the small soulless shelter and manger. Who will not express wonder at the great things above and the small swaddling clothes below! He who loosens is bound; he who nourishes is nourished. The incomprehensible appears as a child. He who makes fountains gush forth is nourished from the Virgin's breasts. He who carries all creation, is unspeakably carried. The all-present One is ineffably limited. O Wonder! What most glorious truths!" (Prologue)

St. John Chrysostom, pondering the manner of the Incarnation of the Son of God, says: "I see the carpenter and the manger, the child and the swaddling clothes, a birth of a Virgin deprived of all that is necessary; all is poverty; all is destitution. Do you not see the riches in that great poverty? How he who is rich became poor for our sake? How he had no

bed, but was laid on a bare manger? O poverty! You are the source of riches! O immeasurable riches, which appear as poverty!" (Works, Vol. 6, p. 698)

St. Ephrem the Syrian summons us to imitate Christ's humility and love: "Today, when God has come to sinners, let not the righteous raise himself above the sinners. Today, the Lord of the universe has come to his servants, let also the master condescend to his servants in love. Today when the Rich One became poor for our sakes, let also the rich invite the poor to his table." (Hymn I, 92-94)

### **The Mystery of the Incarnation — Source of Heavenly Joy**

A heavenly and angelic joy is the third characteristic that radiates from the Christmas sermons of the Holy Fathers and our Christmas liturgy.

St. John Chrysostom begins his first Christmas sermon with words of unspeakable joy and enthusiasm: "What the forefathers longed for, what the prophets predicted and what the righteous long to see, today came to pass and was fulfilled: God appeared on earth and dwelt among men. Therefore, my beloved, let us be glad and rejoice." And in another Nativity sermon he expresses his joy: "And so, seeing all rejoicing, I too, want to rejoice and celebrate. But I rejoice without playing on the zither, without moving a violin bow, without a flute in my hands; I do not even light a torch, but instead of musical instruments I accept the swaddling clothes of Christ. They are for me — hope; they are for me — life; for me they are — salvation; they are for me — the flute; they are for me — the zither." (Works, Vol. 6, p. 698)

St. Gregory the Theologian, calling all to rejoice, says: "Christ has come in the flesh, rejoice with trembling and joy — with trembling because of sin — with joy, because of hope... Who will not adore the Eternal? Who will not praise the Last? Again darkness is dispersed, and again light appears... For I am sure that the heavenly Powers rejoice and celebrate today with us, because they are full of love for man and for God."

Our Christmas services are full of joyful and happy tones. In the Vespers service at Lytiya we sing: "Angels rejoice in heaven and people exult today, and all creatures leap with joy, because of the birth of the Lord Saviour in Bethlehem; for



all deceit of idolatry has ceased and Christ reigns forever." In the sticheras at the Praises in Matins services we sing: "O just ones, be happy; O heavens, rejoice; you mountains, leap for joy because Christ is born. Like the Cherubim, the Virgin makes a throne, carrying in her womb the Incarnate Word of God. Shepherds are gazing upon him who is born; the Magi are offering gifts to the Master. The angels are singing praises, saying: O Incomprehensible Lord, glory to you."

The holy Fathers and authors of our Christmas services not only admire and extol the mystery of the Incarnation, but also summon us to give worship to Christ and bring him the gifts of our faith and love, together with the Most Holy Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, the angels, the shepherds and the Wise Men.

St. Gregory the Theologian in the above-mentioned Christmas sermon calls to us: "Adore the Nativity through which you are freed of the chains of birth. Give honor to little Bethlehem which again led you to paradise. Kneel before the manger through which, being foolish, you were given life by the Word...follow the star, bring with the Wise Men gifts: gold, incense and myrrh, as to a King, as to God, and as to the one who died for you. Bring glory with the shepherds, rejoice with the angels, sing praises with the archangels, so that a common celebration of the heavenly and earthly Powers may be formed."

In the Vespers service of the feast, in extolling the Divine Child, we sing: "O Christ, what shall we offer you for your coming on earth as man for our sake? Every creature that has its being from you gives thanks to you: the angels offer hymns of praise, the heavens give a star; the Magi present their gifts and the shepherds, their wonder; the earth provides a cave and the desert a manger. As for us, we offer a Virgin Mother, O God, You who are from all eternity, have mercy on us."



# **The Synaxis of the Most Holy Mother of God**

*“In heaven he is the one only-begotten of the One Father, and on earth he is the one only-begotten of one Virgin.”  
(St. John Chrysostom)*

The feast of the Nativity of Christ places before us God's great plan for the redemption of the human race. The Son of God, out of infinite love for us, became a small child. For his mother he chose the Most Pure Virgin Mary. Thanks to the Most Holy Mother of God, His plans became a reality. Without her, there would be no Nativity of Christ, no redemption. The renowned church writer, Father M. Meschler, meditating upon the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ and the role the Most Pure Virgin Mary played in it, exclaims: “O wonderful, sublime creature, in whose hand and heart God laid our redemption, on whose consent He made everything depend! Without her, we would not have Jesus, we would not be redeemed. She gave her consent, and gave it freely, with boundless love for us... The immediate effect of the Incarnation upon Mary was that she really became the Mother of God. Mary is really the Mother of God, precisely because she is the Mother of Jesus. (The Life of Jesus Christ in Meditations, Vol. I)

The Eastern Church, conscious of the dignity of Divine Motherhood, dedicated the day following the Nativity of our Lord, to the dignity of the Most Holy Mother of God.

## **The Period of Twelve Days**

The period from the feast of the Nativity of our Lord to the feast of the Theophany lasts twelve days; hence, it has the name “The Twelve Days” from the Greek word “dodekameron”. Just as in ancient times the feast of the

Pasch was celebrated for a whole week until the Sunday of St. Thomas, so also, the feast of the Nativity of our Lord was celebrated for twelve days to the feast of the Theophany.

The celebration of the Twelve Days is substantiated by the Typicon of St. Sabbas the Sanctified (†530), where it is stated that during that time “there is no fasting — hence, the origin of our Privileged Days — nor kneeling in church or in the cells.” The Codex of Emperor Justinian published in 535, dictates an observance of the Twelve Days. The historian, George Cedrenus (12 c), relates that Emperor Justinian himself celebrated the twelve days of the feast with particular devotion and generously distributed alms at that time. The Second Synod of Tours, France, which took place in 567, regards as feastdays all the days from the feast of the Nativity to the Theophany. Of the original twelve days, two are still celebrated in our Church as festal days: the Synaxis of the Most Holy Mother of God and the feast of St. Stephen Protomartyr.



*By Michael Dmytrenko*

## **The Institution of the Synaxis of the Most Holy Mother of God**

After a great feast, the Eastern Church traditionally honors the memory of those persons who played a chief role in the events commemorated by the feast. The Most Holy Mother of God occupies first place after Christ, in the events connected with the Nativity of our Lord. For this reason, in the first centuries, the faithful assembled on the day following the Nativity to express their gratitude to the Most Pure Virgin Mary for having given us the Saviour and to honor her as the Mother of God. From this gathering of the faithful, the feast itself received the name Synaxis which is a Greek word for "gathering".

It is difficult to determine in which century the feast of the Synaxis of the Most Holy Mother of God became a universal practice of the Church. Some of the Fathers of the fourth century, such as St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Epiphany of Cyprus and St. John Chrysostom, on the occasion of the feast of the Nativity of our Lord, praise in their sermons the Most Holy Mother of God. Perhaps at one time, the feast of the Synaxis and the commemoration of St. Stephen the Protomartyr were also celebrated on the same day, for it was not until the seventh century that the commemoration of St. Stephen was transferred to the third day following the feast of the Nativity.

There is an allusion made to the celebration of the Synaxis of the Most Holy Mother of God on the day after the Nativity of our Lord in the 79th rule of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, which met at Constantinople in 691. During that time, in certain localities, a custom was introduced where on the second day after Christmas the faithful exchanged baked goods as though in honor of the travail that the Most Pure Virgin Mary underwent in giving birth to Jesus Christ. The Synod condemned and forbade this practice. "The divine birth by the Virgin," says the Synod, "which was without seed, we profess to have been painless, and this we preach to all the faithful. Hence, we wish to correct those who through ignorance are doing something improper. For there are some who, the day after the feast of the Nativity of Christ our God, prepare baked goods and exchange them among themselves and present them as gifts to one another in honor of the labor



during the childbirth of the all Pure Virgin Mary. We decree that the faithful not do anything similar. This does not bring honor to the Virgin when they designate and represent her marvelous childbirth as an ordinary birth such as the kind we know; because in fact, she gave birth to the uncontainable Word in a manner that is beyond all understanding and expression. If therefore, from this moment on anyone should do this, let the cleric be deprived of his dignity, and the lay person be excommunicated."

Even in Eastern Ukraine a similar custom prevailed. In the villages, on the day of the Synaxis, the women brought to church "phrohy" (potato dumplings), thinking that in this manner they would honor the Most Holy Mother of God, as was generally the custom when someone gave birth to a child. The Kievan Metropolitan Michael Ragoza prohibited such a practice in 1590.

### **The Nativity of Our Lord and The Dignity of the Divine Motherhood**

The Incarnation of our Lord bestowed upon the Most Pure Virgin Mary the dignity of dignities — that of being the Mother of God. By giving birth to Jesus Christ, she became the real Mother of God without ceasing to be a Virgin. This dignity is the source of all privileges and graces bestowed upon her.

St. Ephrem the Syrian (†373), the great eulogist and venerator of the Mother of God, in his Nativity hymns, very beautifully sings the praises of the mystery of the Incarnation, the Virginity, and Divine Motherhood of Mary: "No one knows," he says, "what to call your Mother O Lord! She is called a virgin, though she has a child; she is called a Bride, though she knew no man! If one cannot comprehend your mother, how then can they understand you!" (Hymn, XI, 1) "Your Mother, She is a wonder! The Lord, entering Her becomes a servant. The Almighty through a word enters her, and becomes mute. The Ruler of thunder entered and his voice became silent. The Supreme Shepherd enters and in her becomes a lamb which saw the light of day amid crying." (Hymn XI, 6)

St. John Chrysostom in a sermon on "The Holy Virgin and Mother of God, Mary," meditating on her being chosen the Mother of God, said: "Nothing can be found among men like

the Mother of God, Mary. Consider, O man, all creatures and see — is there anything equal or greater than the holy God-bearer Mary? Go around the earth, plumb the sea, search thoroughly the air, examine in spirit heaven, consider all the visible and invisible forces and tell me — is there a wonder similar among all the creatures?... She alone miraculously conceived in her womb Him Whom all creatures praise in fear and trembling. Blessed are women, for they no longer labor under the curse. She gave birth to a child through whom she surpasses all the angels in glory... Therefore, let us say to her: 'Blessed are you among women! You alone removed the grief of Eve; you alone wiped away her tears; you alone brought redemption to mankind; to you alone was the most precious Pearl entrusted; you alone were conceived without concupiscence and gave birth without travail, you alone gave birth to Emmanuel according to His pleasure.'" (Works, Vol. 8, pp. 906-907)

Our Church on the day of the Synaxis of the Most Holy Mother of God calls upon the faithful to praise the Mother of God: "Come, let us extol the Mother of the Saviour," we sing at the Sticheras of the Praises in Matins, "who, even after giving birth, remained a Virgin. Rejoice, O living garden of the King and God, in which Christ dwelt, and accomplished our salvation. With Gabriel let us offer praise and with the shepherds let us give glory, saying: 'O Mother of God, pray to Him who became incarnate of you for our salvation.'"

The feast of the Synaxis does not have much of its own service. Its service is the service of the Nativity of our Lord. The Menology of Emperor Basil mentions on this day the flight of the Most Holy Mother of God with the Child Jesus into Egypt. The Gospel of this day also speaks of the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt.

The Synods of Zamost and Lviv list among the feasts of the Liturgical Year, the Synaxis of the Most Holy Mother of God and St. Joseph. The Eastern Church does not commemorate St. Joseph in the Synaxis, but honors him on the Sunday after Christmas together with the holy ancestors, King David and the Apostle James, the brother of the Lord. For the Sunday after Christmas, Father Isidore Dolnytskyj composed a beautiful service in honor of St. Joseph, the Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In regard to the service of the Synaxis, he says in his Typicon: "St. Joseph has nothing in this service

except the troparion and the kontakion, and this only in our breviaries and Slyzhebnyks'' (liturgicons=missals). (p. 196)



*The Virgin Hodigitria (15th — 16th c.)*



# **The Feast of St. Stephen the Protomartyr**

*“You fought the good fight, O First-  
Martyr and Apostle of Christ...”  
(Troparion of the Feast)*

In the feast of the Nativity of our Lord we admired the infinite love and sacrifice of God for us sinners. On the third day after the feast of the Nativity, holy Church places before us the heroic example of the love of God in the person of the Protomartyr St. Stephen. St. Gregory of Nyssa in his sermon in honor of St. Stephen says: “Behold we go from one feast to another and receive grace upon grace. Yesterday the Lord of the universe filled us with wonder, whereas today the disciple of the Lord fills us with wonder. In what manner the former, and in what manner the latter? The former (i.e., Christ), for our sakes assumed human nature, while the latter (i.e., St. Stephen) for the sake of the Lord rid himself of human nature. The martyr’s death of St. Stephen is truly singular, as is his cult, which is enjoyed in the Church of Christ since apostolic times.

## **St. Stephen — Apostle, First-Martyr and Archdeacon**

The Eastern Church in giving glory to St. Stephen in its church services, gives him a threefold title, calling him an Apostle, the Protomartyr, and an Archdeacon. St. Stephen belonged to the seventy apostles whose memory our Church honors on the 4th of January. For his holiness, fortitude and zeal in spreading the word of God, he deserves the title of apostle in every way. The Acts of the Apostles say that he was “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit...full of grace and fortitude, who did great wonders and signs among the

people.” (Acts 6, 5 and 8) St. John Chrysostom numbers St. Stephen among the apostles. “Tell me truthfully,” he says, “what did he lack to be equal to the Apostles? Did he not also work miracles? Did he not also manifest fortitude?” (Sermon 15, Acts of the Apostles)

St. Stephen was not only a zealous apostle, but was also the first martyr. Accused before the Synhedrion — the Jewish Council — by false witnesses, he bravely professed the holy faith. For this they led him out of the city and stoned him to death. This occurred in the year 34 or 35 (A.D.) after Christ. Like Christ, he too prayed for his enemies at his death. Saul, a young man who later became the Apostle Paul, took part in his martyrdom. St. Augustine ascribes the conversion of Saul to the martyrdom of St. Stephen. “If Stephen had not prayed,” he says, “the Church would not now have Paul.” St. Stephen was the first to shed his blood and give up his life after the Ascension of our Lord. As a result of this, he received the honorable title of “Protomartyr” (First-Martyr). The holy Fathers highly extol this title in their sermons and it is emphasized, in a special way, in our church services in honor of St. Stephen and in the service commemorating the translation of his holy relics on the 2nd of August.

St. John Chrysostom begins his sermon on St. Stephen the Protomartyr with the words: “All the Martyrs are given glory, and the heroic deeds of the just are everywhere an object of admiration; but at the mention of the most famous heroic deed of the first-martyr Stephen, even the mute tongue begins to praise him. Whom is Blessed Stephen not able to invite to praise (him)? His very name, which in Greek means “crown”, already indicates his merits. His very name suggests that he received the honor of victory! Here the name of the Martyr already implies struggle, victory, and honor!” Another sermon on St. Stephen says: “We crown Stephen with flowers of praise, and we shower upon him roses of laudatory songs. He already crowned himself with victorious prizes... Who among mortals can give worthy praise to the fighter? Who of us is able to weave a wreath fitting his heroic deed? What tongue is able to expound the glory of the victor? What lips shall speak in praise of the heroic deeds of Stephen? What mouth is able to express the fortitude of the first Martyr?”

In her services on the feast of St. Stephen and the translation of his relics on the 2nd of August, the Eastern Church ex-



tols his martyrdom with various titles of praise: "The beginning and praise of the martyrs", "the first-martyr", "the first among the martyrs", "the protomartyr (first-martyr)", "Apostle", "soldier (warrior) of Christ", "the glorious leader of the martyrs", "the praise of the apostles and the glory of the martyrs", "the protomartyr", "the door of the martyrs", "the wise first-martyr", "the leader of the assembly of martyrs". In the stichera of the aposticha in the Vespers service, we praise him: "You became the first among the martyrs and deacons, O Stephen Apostle, the ornament of martyrs, the fortress of the faithful, glory of the just. Since you stand before the throne of Christ the King, implore Him to cleanse the sins of those who celebrate your memory and to render them worthy of the kingdom of heaven." In the kontakion honoring the translation of his relics, holy Church invokes him: "You were the first to be sown on earth by the heavenly Sower, O all praiseworthy Stephen; you were the first on earth to shed your blood for Christ, O Blessed One; you were the first to be crowned in heaven by Him with the crown of victory, O first fruit of the martyrs, O crown of martyrdom, O first-martyr Stephen."

Stephen was first among the seven deacons chosen to take care of the poor; hence he is called the Archdeacon.

### **The Cult of St. Stephen**

St. Stephen is the first-martyr and prototype of all martyrs and so his cult is the oldest of all the martyrs. The date of his death is unknown. Holy Church linked his memory with the feast of the Nativity of our Lord, for as the first-martyr of Christ he bore a very close relation with Christ. Originally, both the Eastern and the Western Churches celebrated the feast of St. Stephen on the second day after Christmas. But when the custom of celebrating the Synaxis of the Most Holy Mother of God on the day after Christmas emerged in the Eastern Church, then somewhere in the seventh century, the feast of St. Stephen was transferred to the third day after Christmas. To this day the Western Church celebrates the feast of St. Stephen on the 26th of December.

The feast of St. Stephen was already generally known in the fourth century and was celebrated on an equal footing with those of the Apostles. The Apostolic Constitutions of the

fourth century say: "Let them celebrate on the day of the first-martyr Stephen." The holy Fathers of the fourth century, such as St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine, preached sermons in honor of St. Stephen. In the fourth and fifth centuries, in the East and in the West, churches were built in his honor. In Constantinople itself, there are as many as three churches in memory of St. Stephen.

A further motive for the cult of St. Stephen was the finding of his relics in 415. It was then that the teacher of the Apostle Paul, who died believing in Christ, appeared three times to a priest of Jerusalem, Lucianus. He told Lucianus that, after the stoning of Stephen, he buried Stephen's body in his own tomb, where it now rests together with the remains of his son, Avivus, and near them Nicodemus — the secret disciple of Christ. The discovered relics of St. Stephen were transferred to the church on Sion, in Jerusalem. Sometime afterwards they were again transferred to the Church of the Stoning, north of Jerusalem. The wife of Emperor Theodosius the Younger, Eudokia, in the year 460, at the place of the original Church of the Stoning, built a beautiful basilica which was later destroyed. The ruins of this basilica were discovered in 1812, and upon the old foundation the present day church of St. Stephen was erected.

A later tradition has it that the site of St. Stephen's martyrdom was the valley of the Cedron, east of Jerusalem. Hence, the Eastern gate of the old city is now called the gate of St. Stephen.

In the year 560 part of the relics of St. Stephen were transferred to Constantinople and deposited, first in the church of St. Lawrence, and later in the newly built church of St. Stephen. The Greek Church celebrates the translation of the relics to Constantinople on the 2nd of August. Just as at the finding, so too, at the translation of the relics of St. Stephen, various miracles took place. St. Augustine, the great venerator of St. Stephen speaks of these miracles.

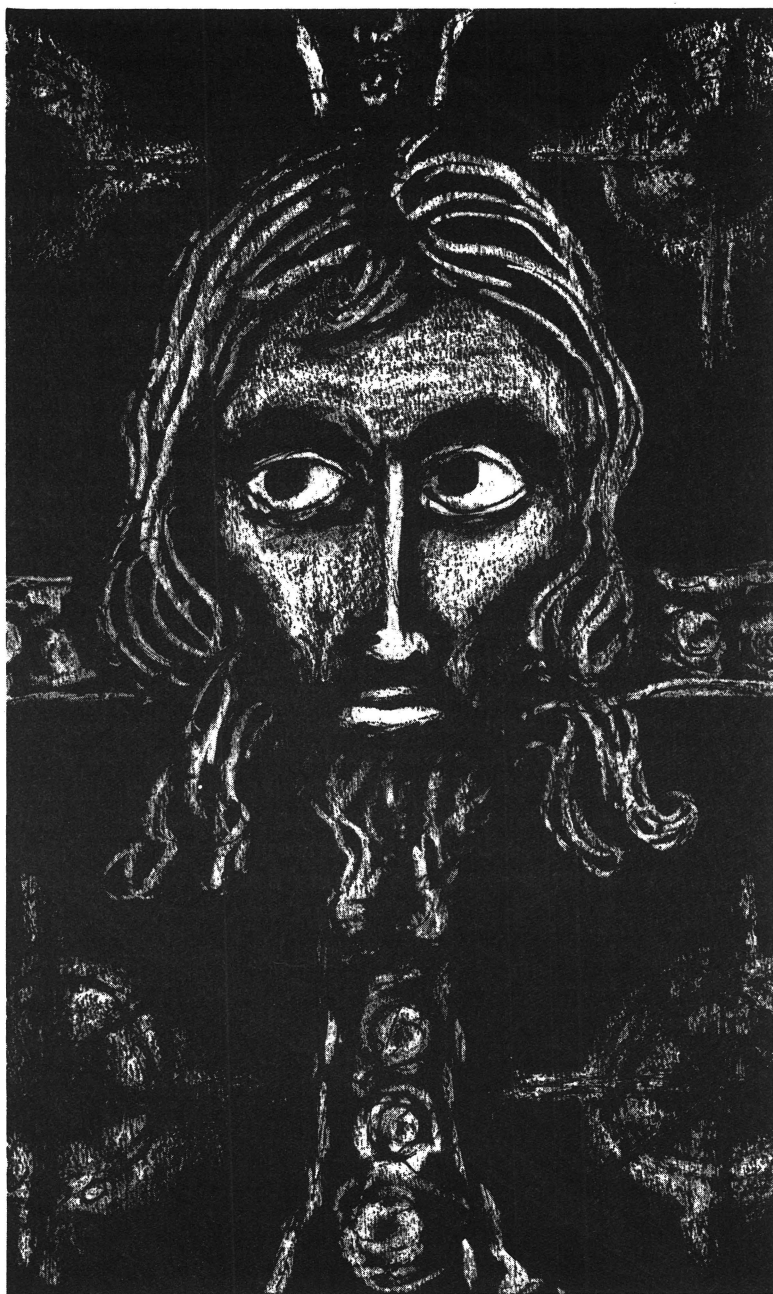
### **St. Stephen the First-Martyr — Our Model**

The Christian religion is a religion of heroism. It cultivates and trains heroes and demands heroism. The life of a good Christian is a constant struggle with the devil, the passions

and the world, which is the enemy of God. The Christian must always place the love of God above all things: above his "I", above worldly interests, above all comforts, above father, mother, brother and sister, and even life itself. This is what Jesus Christ Himself taught and demanded: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14, 26-27)

St. John Chrysostom in a sermon on St. Stephen reminds us of the obligation to struggle for the sake of Christ and the salvation of our soul. "The present life," he says, "is the time of struggle. Here we must wage war and struggle. During war no one seeks rest. During war no one thinks of comfort, no one cares for possessions, no one worries about a wife, but worries only about one thing — how to overcome the enemy. We too shall act in the same manner. If we overcome and return with trophies, then God will give us all things."

Upon us all weighs the obligation of being Christians not only in name, but also in the faithful and courageous profession of our faith in word, deed and our entire life, and, if necessary, even in death by giving up our lives for the faith. St. Stephen, the first-martyr, gives us an inspiring example of a courageous and heroic profession of faith. St. John Chrysostom, setting before us St. Stephen as a model for imitation, says: "Whoever would go to battle for the sake of Christ has St. Stephen for his teacher. Whoever would go forth to the struggle of martyrdom will imitate Stephen. Stephen is the leader of the fighters for Christ; Stephen is the support of those who die for Him."



*The stoning of St. Stephen*

## Feast of St. Basil the Great

*"O our Father Basil, You acquired the virtues of all the Saints, the humility of Moses, the zeal of Elias, the profession of Peter and the theology of John, Paul's unceasing pleading..."*  
(Stichera at the Aposticha of the Feast of St. Basil)

On the first of January, the beginning of the civil year, our Church celebrates the memory of the death of one of the greatest and most outstanding Fathers of the Church and doctors of the faith and of monastic legislators — St. Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea, Cappodocia, of Asia Minor (329-379). His person is in every respect extraordinary, noble, illustrious and worthy of praise. He was not only an aristocrat by birth, but also an aristocrat in spirit, character, learning and holiness. The mark of his deep faith, heroic love of God and neighbor, learning and holiness is stamped on the entire Church of Christ, on the monastic life in the East and on our people.

The French author, Jean Rivier, in his book "St. Basil, Bishop of Caesarea" says of him, "St. Basil is one of the most illustrious and renowned figures of the ancient Greek Church. His contemporaries had already conferred upon him the title 'the Great'... he is an ascetic by calling and a man of action by nature... His rule became the code of monastic life in the East, as did the rule of St. Benedict in the West... He is an ascetic, bishop, orator, theologian and scholar. He, without the least doubt, is the most perfect representative of the Church of his times... His life was in complete harmony with his learning, or to put it more clearly, his learning was nothing else than a reflection of his life."

Small wonder then, that holy Church justifiably gave him the title "the Great". He is truly "Great" especially in three



areas of his life: as a great archbishop of the Church, as a great legislator of monastic life, and as a man of great holiness.

## **Basil — Great Archbishop of the Church**

The first outstanding characteristic of St. Basil as an archbishop was his fearlessness in professing and defending the holy faith against the Arian heretics who fiercely persecuted the true followers of Christ. Emperor Valens (364-379), baptized by an Arian bishop, became a relentless apostle of Arianism. Amid the inhuman and savage persecutions of the bishops and the faithful, Basil alone dared to oppose the emperor himself. Historians recorded the encounter of St. Basil with Modest, the prefect of the pretorium. He too was, like Valens, a staunch Arian. At his command, eighty-eight priests were burned at sea in a ship. Modest summoned Basil to appear before him, and received him in a most insolent manner, not even addressing him by his title of bishop. Shouting at him vehemently, he threatened Basil with exile, confiscation, torture and death. To these terrible threats, St. Basil calmly replied, "If there is anything else, threaten me with that too, for none of these things you have mentioned can affect me." Modest afterwards reported this conversation with Basil to the emperor, saying: "My lord, we have been worsted by the head of this church. The man is superior to threats, deaf to arguments, incapable of persuasion." After other futile attempts to persuade Basil, the emperor finally ceased to provoke him further.

From Basil's deep faith arose his other outstanding trait — his sacrificial love of God and neighbor. Sacrifice is the language of love. In Basil, this language of sacrifice was very strong, eloquent and active. His love, ever vigilant, sensitive, open, and all-embracing impelled him to be ever ready to assist either friend or foe. For the destitute, the aged, the sick, the outcast, orphans, and widows he established large charitable institutions which formed, as it were, a separate city near Caesarea; in his honor it was called "The Basiliade".

Basil sacrificed all his great talents, learning, energy and health for the welfare of his flock. In every way possible he defended his people against the attacks of the Arians, using every possible means at his disposal. His friend, St. Gregory of Nazianzen, mentioned this in his funeral oration on St. Basil:

“Basil visited some, sent messages to others, and summoned still others; he admonished, reproved, censured, threatened, and upbraided; he assumed the defense of nations, cities, and individuals; he contrived every kind of deliverance...” (43) (Eulogy in honor of St. Basil the Great)

St. Basil was a zealous apostle of the Word of God, that is, of preaching. In his time, sermons were very important and powerful because they were almost the only means of instructing the people in the holy faith. By the grace of God, Basil was an eloquent speaker. His speech was ardent, fiery and poignant. St. Ephrem the Syrian relates that he came to Caesarea to visit St. Basil and, entering a church where Basil was preaching, he saw a white dove hovering over the shoulder of St. Basil. At this sight, he exclaimed: “Great are you, O God, in your truth. Basil is a pillar of fire through whose lips the Holy Spirit speaks.” The fiery pillar symbolizes Basil’s heroic love of God and of neighbor. For this reason, it was adopted as the symbol of his sons, members of the Order of St. Basil the Great, commonly known as Basilians.

St. Basil the Great was also a master and apostle of the written word. Although his life was short, he managed to produce a surprising variety of works. Dogmatic, moral, ascetical, and polemical works, commentaries on Holy Scripture, and 366 letters constitute his spiritual legacy.

### **St. Basil — The Great Legislator of Monastic Life**

Another area of activity in which St. Basil revealed his greatness as an unsurpassed organizer and legislator is monasticism. His name is forever inscribed in the history of monastic communities, monastic rules and the doctrine of asceticism, not only in the Eastern Church and in our native land of Ukraine, but also throughout the entire Catholic Church. St. Theodore the Studite (759-826) calls St. Basil “the father of Greek monasticism and the first of all the Fathers.” The father of Western monasticism, St. Benedict (480-543), knew his monastic rules and benefited from them, commanding in his own Rule that the Rule of St. Basil the Great also be read.

“Of all the services rendered by Basil to the cause of monasticism,” says W. L. Clark, “the introduction of the com-



*St. Basil — S. Hordynsky*

mon life is the one by which he most deserves to be remembered... The Pachomian monasteries were cenobitic only in outward appearance; their inner essence was individualistic. Basil made cenobitism a reality... He must be regarded as a pioneer in working out the ideal of the common life." (St. Basil the Great).

According to St. Basil the purpose of monastic life is not only personal salvation, but also salvation of neighbor. For the monks of St. Basil apostolic work outside the monastery is not an exception, but a rule. According to him the love of neighbor is the measure of the love of God.

The monastic rules of St. Basil were the result of his profound knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, his great learning, his wide experience of life, his sincere holiness and eminently practical mind. His rules are, in truth, the lived reality of the Holy Gospels. St. Theodore the Studite, the great venerator of St. Basil and restorer of his rules, speaks of him thus: "Whoever follows Basil, follows the Holy Spirit, and whoever does not have faith in him, has no faith in Christ who spoke through him." The Servant of God Metropolitan Andrew gives the following evaluation of the rules of St. Basil: "After the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Apostles, there is no other book as authoritative for the monks as the rules of our holy Father, St. Basil."

By his rules, St. Basil laid a lasting foundation for common life in the monastery; hence, some historians regard him as the true originator of the common life, even though this title of the first organizer is ascribed to St. Pachomius (†347). Small wonder then, that the monastic rules of St. Basil survived the various vicissitudes of history and have remained to the present day the authoritative rule in Eastern monasticism.

Monasticism made its appearance in Rus-Ukraine simultaneously with the coming of Christianity. The founders of monastic life in Rus-Ukraine were the two great ascetics and sons of Ukraine — St. Anthony (†1073) and St. Theodosius (†1074) Pechersky. As the foundation of monastic life, St. Theodosius used the rule of St. Theodore the Studite, which is based on the rules of St. Basil the Great.

The most beautiful praise in respect to the monastic rules of St. Basil was expressed by one of his great spiritual sons, Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky: "The saints of our Basilian Order modelled themselves on his rules. His rules were a

school for a whole range of countless saints — from St. John Damascene, St. Maxim, and St. Theodore the Studite to the Saints Anthony and Theodosius Pechersky and St. Josaphat, who from these rules drew that great spirit with which he renewed our Church and our people.” (Introduction to the “An Extract from the Rules of Our Father St. Basil the Great for Nuns”)

At the time of the Brest Union, the ideal of the monk-apostle in the spirit of the Basilian tradition was once more revived and began to shine forth in our country. Metropolitan



*St. Basil (11th c.), St. Sophia, Kiev*

V. Rutsky and St. Josaphat were the great reformers and organizers of monastic life in our Uniate Church. After the pattern of the Western monastic orders, they brought about a complete centralization of our monasteries, using the rules of St. Basil the Great as the basis of monastic life. Since that time, the work of the Order has covered three specific areas: missionary and pastoral work, education, and publications.

Although Russian Communism has brutally suppressed the Basilian Order in our native land, nevertheless, the Order has not perished. It still lives on today and its members are continuing its traditional work as missionaries, educators and publishers among our faithful who have settled in foreign countries.

### **St. Basil — A Great Saint**

The German historian, Hans von Kampenhausen, in a book entitled "The Greek Church Fathers", speaking of St. Basil, said: "Basil is an ascetic body and soul. Austere asceticism is the element in which he labors spiritually, lives and exists." According to the expression of St. Basil "monks are those who struggle for holiness." In the introduction to his Longer Rules he says: "You and I, we have the same goal — holiness of life." As he taught, so he lived. Magnanimity, uncompromising will, angelic innocence and love of sacrifice for God and neighbor — these were the distinctive marks of Basil's character. "When St. Basil once decided on something," says the French author, P. Humberclaude, "he pursued it to the end... Thus he remained to the end of his life... This feature of his character became evident in his asceticism." (Ascetical Teaching of St. Basil) The British historian, F. Farrar remarked: "Basil did not belong to those who do things half way. When he consecrated himself to God, he did it without reservation." (Lives of the Saints)

His holiness, virtues and greatness are extolled by our Church in her services in honor of his feast. Here he is praised as "the holy tongue of Christ", "the shepherd of Christ's Church", "the divine and holy bee of Christ's Church", "royal ornament of the Church", "a rich treasure of learning", "invincible defender of the Trinity". Addressing him, the liturgy proclaims, "You walked the rough road of the virtues", "your word is angelic bread", "you are a chalice of

innocence", "for monks a model of virtue", "a light of piety", and a "trumpet of theology".

Immediately after Basil's death, Holy Church began to venerate him as a Saint and to celebrate the day of his death on the first of January. The historian T. Rufin (+410), who eighteen years after the death of St. Basil translated his Rules into Latin, in a letter accompanying the translation addresses Basil as a Saint: "I translated," he says, "the monastic rules of Saint Basil, Bishop of Cappodocia, a man renowned for his faith, works and every kind of holiness."

Because the feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord is celebrated on January 1, the Latin Church honors his memory on the 14th of June, on which day he was consecrated bishop in the year 370. The church service in honor of St. Basil was composed by Anatolus of Constantinople (5c), St. John Damascene and Germanus of Constantinople (8c).

Thus we have briefly outlined a silhouette of the immortal figure of St. Basil the Great and his everlasting significance for our Church and Ukrainian monasticism. With the words of St. Paul, "Brethren, be imitators of me as I am of Christ" (I Cor. 11) St. Basil summons us all also to imitate his deep faith, his sacrificial and all embracing love of God and neighbor, and his great holiness.



*Emblem of the Order of St. Basil the Great*

## Feast of the Circumcision

*“The Lord is circumcised on the eighth day as a child, receiving the name Jesus, for He is the Saviour and Lord of the world.” (Ode 8 of the Canon of Matins)*

The next important event in the life of Jesus Christ, following that of the feast of the Nativity of Christ, is the event of the circumcision and naming of the Lord. The Holy Gospel relates: “And when the eight days were fulfilled for his circumcision, his name was called Jesus, given Him by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.” (Luke 2,21) Jesus Christ, being God and the Lawgiver, was not obligated to observe the religious prescriptions of the Jews; nonetheless, he willingly submitted to and observed them. Hence, on the eighth day after his birth he submitted to the rite of circumcision. We celebrate this event on the first of January.

Let us examine the law of circumcision and its significance in the Old Testament, the institution of the feast of the Circumcision, and its significance for us.

### Circumcision in the Old Testament

The practice of circumcising children of the male sex is a very ancient custom among many peoples of the East. Circumcision was usually performed on boys in the stage of puberty and was a symbol of their initiation into manhood.

Among the Israelites, circumcision became a law at the time of Abraham. Among the Jews it had great significance for it was the symbol of their covenant with God. We read about this in the Book of Genesis: “God said to Abraham: ‘And you therefore shall keep my covenant, and your seed after you in their generations. This is my covenant which you shall





observe, between me and you, and your seed after you: All male kind of you shall be circumcised; and you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, that it may be for a sign of the covenant between me and you. An infant of eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man-child in your generations.''' (17,9-12)

For the Jews the prescription had far-reaching consequences. First of all, circumcision was the sign of one's being a member of the people of God. It meant submitting oneself to the law and its duties. "I testify again to every man who has himself circumcised," says St. Paul, "that he is bound to observe the whole law." (Gal. 5,3) Through circumcision every Jew became a participant in the blessing and promises God made to his people. It was necessary for participation in the paschal sacrifice. Finally, non-observance of the law of

circumcision incurred excommunication from the Jewish community. "The male whose flesh of his foreskin shall not be circumcised, such one shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." (Genesis, 17,14)

In the Old Testament, the word "circumcision" is frequently used in a symbolic sense when, for example, we read of "circumcised" or "uncircumcised" hearts, lips or ears, to indicate obedience to the Lord God or rebellion against him. Thus, St. Stephen, the protomartyr, rebukes the members of the Sanhedrin: "you stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit." (Acts 7,51)

The Old Testament circumcision prefigured the New Testament baptism, which incorporates us into Christ. St. Paul calling baptism a circumcision not wrought by hands, says: "In him, you also are circumcised with circumcision not made by hand, in despoiling of the body of the flesh, but in the circumcision of Christ. Buried with him in baptism, in whom also you are risen again." (Col. 2,11-12)

### **Institution of the Feast**

The feast of Circumcision originated and developed first in the Western Church, and later passed over to the Eastern Church. The Latin Church originally called this feast the feast of the Octave of the Lord, that is, the eighth day after Christmas, which fell right on New Year's Day.

The ancient pagans had a saying: "As the first day of the New Year is, so also will the whole year be." Therefore on that day they conducted games, indulged in feasting, carousing and all kinds of masquerades. Men dressed as women and women as men. They put on skins of animals; for example, the head of a cow, deer or dog. They dressed as gods and goddesses and even abandoned themselves to immoral excesses. St. John Chrysostom spoke out against this pagan merry-making on the occasion of the New Year: "They think that if they pass the first day of this month in pleasure and merriment, the whole year will be the same... This is extreme stupidity after this one pleasurable day to expect the whole year to be the same... The year will be happy for you in all things not when you carouse on the first day, but when you do what is pleasing to God on the first and every day of the year." (Sermon on the New Year)



*The Main Gate of the Holy Trinity Church, Kiev*

Holy Church, in order to counteract those loathesome pagan practices, summoned the faithful, on the occasion of the New Year, not to pleasurable joy but to fasting and penance for the sins of the pagans. St. Augustine in his sermon on the New Year encouraged his faithful to do penance: "In order to stop the carnal pleasure of the pagans, on the day of

the Circumcision, with the help of God, we shall fast, except for those who, because of bad health cannot fast, and we shall publicly pray to God for those pitiful pagans who on these days of the New Year according to their custom indulge in sensuality and unrestrained excess." In some places this fast even lasted three days, as can be inferred from the seventeenth canon of the Council of Tours (567) in France: "Since between the feasts of the Nativity of Christ and the Theophany, the pagans celebrate their festivities, it is necessary during that time to fast for three days." When in the sixth century, under the influence of the Christian faith, the pagan festivities fell into oblivion, the feast of the Circumcision assumed a joyful character. After the Second Vatican Council, the feast of the Circumcision in the Latin Church again received its original title: "Octava Domini" that is the eighth day after the Nativity of our Lord.

In the East, the feast of the Circumcision seems to have become universal during the eighth and ninth centuries, for at that time, the Byzantine calendars assigned the feast of the Circumcision and the feast of our Father St. Basil the Great to the first of January. St. Andrew of Crete (8c) has a sermon on the feast of the Circumcision and on St. Basil the Great.

On this feastday the Eastern Church celebrates two events: the circumcision of our Lord and the conferral of the name Jesus, which means "saviour". Hence, this feast is also called the Naming of Jesus Christ. In the ninth Ode of the canon in the Matins service of this feast, we sing: "Come, let us celebrate in the temple of the Lord the glorious name of Christ: Jesus was called today by a name worthy of God."

The feast of the Circumcision, though considered a great feast, is not one of the twelve principal feasts; it does not have either a pre- or post-feast. Strictly speaking, it brings to a close the post-feast of Christ's Nativity. The Canon of the Matins service of the feast was composed by St. Stephen Sabaite (8c).

### **Significance of the Feast for Us**

The feast of the Circumcision speaks to us of sacrifice and self-denial. There is no genuine service of God without the observance of God's commandments and the fulfillment of Christian duties. Every Christian must practice a spiritual circumcision, that is, he must conquer his senses, his evil inclina-

tions and his passions. "For we are the circumcision, we who serve God in spirit, who glory in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh." (Philip. 3,3)

The naming of Jesus reminds us of the holiness and power of that name and its great significance for every Christian. The Lord God himself bestowed upon Christ this name: "She shall bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1,21)

Before his ascension into heaven, Jesus Christ gave his disciples the following promise: "In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak in new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay their hands upon the sick and they shall get well." (Mk. 16, 17-18) In regard to the holiness and power of the holy name of Jesus, St. Paul says: "Therefore, God has exalted him and has bestowed upon him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend of those in heaven, on earth and under the earth..." (Philip. 2,9-10)

St. John Chrysostom commenting on the words of the Psalmist: "O Lord, how admirable is your name in the whole earth," (Ps. 8,2) says: "By this name death is destroyed, demons bound, heaven opened, the gates to paradise unlocked, the Holy spirit sent, slaves are freed, enemies become sons, strangers become heirs, and men become angels." Commenting on the words "holy and terrible is his name", (110,9) St. John Chrysostom says: "How is his name terrible and holy? Demons are terrified by his name, sicknesses fear it; using that name, the Apostles converted the whole world; David wielded it instead of arms and overcame the enemy; through it a wealth of great deeds was accomplished; through it we perform the holy Sacraments." (Sermon on the Psalms)

Thus, it is our sacred obligation to glorify Christ's name, to honor it, to call upon it, to utter it reverently with our lips as did his Mother Mary and St. Joseph, and as did thousands upon thousands of martyrs and confessors who went to torture and death with that name on their lips. Through unceasingly invoking the name of Jesus in the so-called "Jesus Prayer" the ascetics achieved great holiness. The holy name of Christ is for us the pledge of blessings, a guarantee that our prayers will be answered; through it, we receive forgiveness of our sins, power to resist temptations, and grace to effect

salvation. Let us never forget that as Christians we bear the name of Christ. A very beautiful and ancient Christian custom urges us to salute one another with the name of Christ.

In Baptism, we also received the name of our holy namesake. That name should be for us holy and precious; with that name we shall enter eternity. "There is nothing that makes the name of a man immortal," says St. John Chrysostom, "as much as virtue. The martyrs, the relics of the apostles, the memory of those who lived virtuously prove this... The fisherman Peter accomplished nothing great, but when he gave himself to virtue, he captured the imperial city (Rome) and after death he shines brighter than the sun." (Sermon on the Psalms)



# Jordan Water-Blessing

*“Come, then, King and Lover of  
mankind and sanctify this water  
through the descent of the Holy Spirit.”  
(Rite of the Solemn Blessing of  
Water — The Great Water-Blessing)*

Closely connected with the feast of the Theophany is the Great Water-Blessing or Blessing of Jordan Water. This sacred tradition of the Eastern Church can be traced back to the first centuries of Christianity. In the course of time, different rites developed for the Great Water-Blessing on the feast of the Theophanies. From earliest times our people have greatly cherished the custom of the Great Water-Blessing (Blessing of Jordan Water). The people attached great significance of the Blessed Jordan Water which they kept in their homes as something possessing great sanctifying powers. Here we shall consider the history of the Great Water-Blessing (Jordan Water), its rites, and its holiness.

## History of the Great Water-Blessing

The Eastern Church distinguishes between a small and a great blessing of water. The small blessing of water takes place on the first of August, on the feast of Mid-Pentecost, the feast of the patron saint, and on other occasions. In Greece, there exists the custom of sanctifying water by using the small blessing every month.

The Great or Jordan Water-Blessing is performed twice a year: on the vigil and on the feast of the Theophany. In the first centuries, solemn baptism of Catechumens took place on the eve of the great feast days, such as the Pasch (Easter), the Descent of the Holy Spirit or Theophany. The blessing of water was associated with this rite of baptism. Some historians are of the opinion that the Great Water-Blessing on

the eve of the feast of the Theophany was not intended to commemorate the baptism of Christ, but was meant only for the baptism of the catechumens. This is evident in the first prayer of the Jordan Water-Blessing which is almost identical to the prayer of blessing of water at baptism.

The first four centuries do not give us clear information regarding the time when the blessing of Jordan water took place. In his sermon on the feast of the Theophany St. John Chrysostom speaks of a water blessing at midnight, "for on this day," he says, "Christ was baptised and sanctified the nature of water." Ever since the fifth century, the blessing of water has generally been performed on the Eve of the Theophany. The Historians George Cedrenus (12c) and Theodore the Lector testify that the Patriarch Peter, contemporary of Emperor Zenon (474-491), was the first to introduce the custom of blessing water towards the evening of the Eve of the Theophany. Jacob of Edessa (5c) followed suit.

In the first millennium of the Eastern Church, only one Jordan Water-Blessing took place and this occurred on the Eve of the feast. The ancient Greek Typicons and sources speak of one water blessing. The Greek Typicon of the Sinai library dating from the twelfth century prescribes the blessing of water only on the Eve of the feast of the Theophany. Regarding the feast itself, it states: "After Matins, there is no second blessing of water." The Typicon of the patriarchal library of Jerusalem of the fourteenth century notes: "You must also know that in the Typicon of the Great Church (that is, of Constantinople) one water blessing is prescribed, namely, on the Eve of the feast. The Typicons of the Studite monastery and of Jerusalem prescribe one water blessing, for Christ was baptized only once, not twice."

The custom of blessing water twice dates from the eleventh century: on the Eve and on the day of the feast. This custom of a twofold blessing became a general law in the thirteenth century. The Typicon of the Venetian library of the year 1387 prescribed two water blessings: on the Eve and on the day of the feast. This custom of a twofold blessing became a general law in the thirteenth century. The Typicon of the Venetian library of the year 1387 prescribed two water blessings: on the Eve and on the day of the feast after the Great Doxology. The Typicon of St. Andrew Skete on Mt. Athos, of the fifteenth century, speaks of a Great Water-Blessing on the





*Jordan Water-Blessing*

Eve after the Prayer behind the Ambo and on the feast, after the Matins service. The reason for the twofold water blessing was that the water blessing on the Eve of the feast was regarded as a symbol of the former practice of baptizing the catechumens, while the water blessing on the day of the feast was performed in memory of Christ's baptism in the river Jordan. Hence, the first water blessing, as a rule, took place in the vestibule of the Church, where in former times the catechumens were baptized, while the water blessing on the day of the feast took place outside the church, at rivers, springs or wells. The Synod of Lviv (1891) directed that the rite of water blessing be carried out both on the Eve and on the day of the Feast of the Theophany.

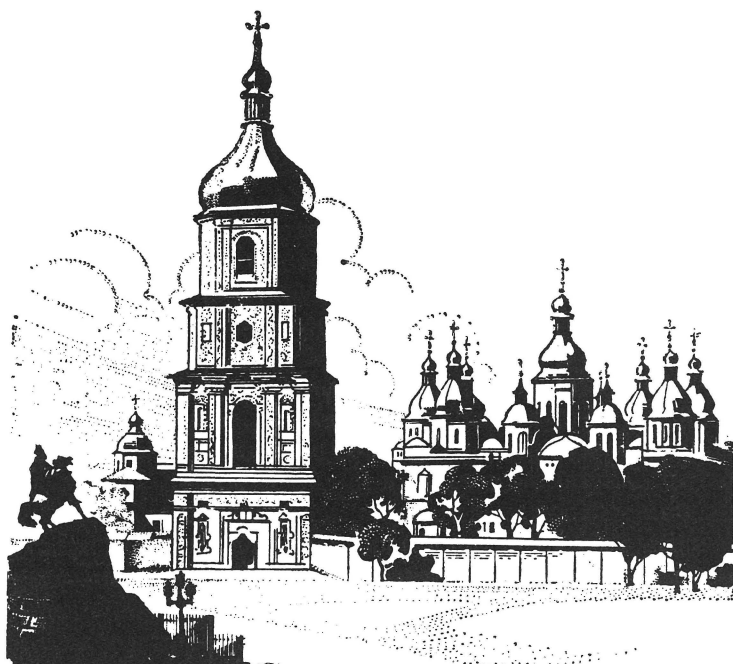
## The Rites of the Great Water-Blessing

The ceremonies of the Great Water-Blessing took hundreds of years to develop. We do not know the form of the original rite of the Jordan Water-Blessing. Jacob of Edessa bore witness that the prayer "Great are You, O Lord..." came from St. Proclus, Patriarch of Constantinople (434-446); the stichera "The voice of the Lord cries over the waters" and the prayer "O Trinity, transcendent in essence..." from Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (†c641). Of the Great Water-Blessing the Barberini Euchologion from the eighth-ninth century has only the Great Ektenia which is different from our present day one, and three prayers. The Typicon of the Great Church of the ninth-tenth century notes that, toward the end of the Liturgy, the cantors sing the troparion "The Voice of the Lord" and while it is being sung, all go to the baptistry in the narthex (or vestibule) of the Church. Here the deacon sings the ektenia and the patriarch reads the prayer for the sanctification of the water and blesses the water; three readings follow, and with the singing of the troparion the rite of water-blessing is concluded.

From the thirteenth century, the rite of Water-Blessing became somewhat like our own, and in the fourteenth-sixteenth centuries, the rite of the Great Water-Blessing assumed its present form.

Around 1148 the Ipatian Chronicle mentions the Jordan Water-Blessing in our native Ukraine, and calls it "Vodokhryshi" (Voda=water; khrystyty=to baptise) or "Water-baptism" that is, the baptism of water. Originally, it took place in our Church only on the vigil of the feast of the Theophany. Only after our Church in the fourteenth century began using the Jerusalem Typicon, instead of the Studite Typicon, did she adopt the two water-blessings. Maxim the Greek (†1556), defends the new custom according to which water-blessing took place on the day of the feast itself at the river or spring. The liturgicon of Metropolitan Cyprian (†1406) already had the present rite of Jordan Water-Blessing.

In time, there developed in our Ukrainian Church certain rites connected with the Great Water-Blessing which the Greeks or other Slavonic Typicons do not have. The Greek Typicons speak only of a threefold cruciform submersion of the cross in the water at the end of the Water-Blessing. The



*Cathedral of St. Sophia, Kiev. 1017, rebuilt 18th-19th Cent.*

Russian rite of the Great Water-Blessing has, besides this, a three-fold blessing of the water with the hand. The Euchologion of Metropolitan Peter Mohyla of the year 1646, prescribes that after the first prayer the water be blessed three times cruciformly, i.e., by making the sign of the cross in the water with a burning candle; after the second prayer — that it be breathed upon three times cruciformly, (i.e. each time the priest breaths upon the water, he makes the sign of the cross with his head), and after the third prayer — that it be blessed with the hand submerged in the water. According to the present day custom we use for the blessing not one, but three three-branched burning candlesticks which we submerge into the water three times. The rite of the Jordan Water-Blessing ends with a threefold cruciform blessing of the water with the cross by submerging it into the water, while the troparion “O Lord when you had been baptized in the Jordan...” is being sung. After the Water-Blessing, the priest sprinkles the people with the holy water. Our people had a beautiful custom of erecting a cross of ice at the river where the water-blessing took place.

## **The Jordan Water — The Very Sacred Object**

From very ancient times the Eastern Church has regarded the sanctified Jordan water as a great sacramental, possessing miraculous powers for healing both soul and body. In a sermon on the feast of the Theophany St. John Chrysostom says: "This is the day on which Christ was baptized and blessed the substance of waters. For this reason, at midnight of this feast, the faithful take water home and keep it throughout the year. It is interesting to note that this blessed water is not spoiled for a long time; it remains fresh even for two or three years, and after such a long period its quality does not differ from the water recently brought from the well." The Greek Church calls the Jordan water "mega hagiaσμα" which signifies "something very sacred".

In antiquity there prevailed the custom in the Church that those who were unable to receive Holy Communion for some reason or other were given the Jordan Water to drink. Our people cherished the Jordan Water with such devotion that they observed a strict fast up to the time of its blessing and received it, fasting, as they would Holy Communion. Our people sprinkled all their buildings and the whole farm with this water to drive away every impure spirit from their land. Even today in foreign countries where Ukrainians have settled, they gladly receive the priest who blesses and sanctifies their homes with Jordan Water.

The content of the prayers and rites of the Great Water-Blessing best reflect the faith of our Eastern Church in the power and blessing of Jordan Water. In these prayers we repeatedly call upon the Holy Spirit to come down upon the water, to purify and sanctify it, and impart to it a healing power for the benefit of soul and body. The Great Ektenia at the blessing of the water has as many as twenty-six petitions, among which we find the following: "that these waters may be sanctified by the power, operation and descent of the Holy Spirit", "that there may descend upon these waters the purifying action of the most substantial Trinity", "that this water may be endowed with the grace of redemption, the blessing of the Jordan, through the power and action and descent of the Holy Spirit", "that we be enlightened by the light of understanding and of piety through the descent of the Holy Spirit", "that it may serve as a purification of the souls and

bodies of all those who, with faith, shall draw and partake of it", "that it be a gift of sanctification, deliverance from sin, healing of soul and body, and for every other benefit."

The very beautiful and profound prayers of the Jordan Water-Blessing extol the Most Holy Trinity and entreat the Holy Spirit to come down and Himself sanctify the water. Here the significance, power, and sanctity of the Jordan Water-Blessing is emphasized. The following example may help us understand the significance of these prayers: "Today the waters of the river Jordan are changed into healing by the coming of the Lord. Today the sins of mankind are washed away by the waters of the Jordan. Today paradise has been opened to mankind and the Sun of righteousness shines down upon us... Today we are delivered from ancient lamentation and like a new Israel, we are saved. Today we are delivered from darkness and illuminated with the light of the knowledge of God... Today whole creation is brightened... Therefore, O King and Lover of mankind, come and sanctify this water through the descent of your Holy Spirit. And confer upon it the grace of redemption, and the blessing of Jordan. Make it a font of incorruptibility, a gift of sanctification, a remission of sins, a healing of sickness, a destroyer of demons, render it inaccessible to the adverse powers, and make it full of the power of Angels, so that all who draw from it and partake of it may be blessed in their souls and bodies, healed of their sufferings, sanctified in their homes, and they may receive every befitting grace... Grant sanctification, blessing, cleansing and health to all those who touch it, who sprinkle themselves with it or partake of it."



## Feast of the Theophany

*"Then Jesus came from Galilee to John,  
at the Jordan, to be baptized by him."  
(Matthew 3,13)*

Before the feast of the Theophany, Holy Church in her services exhorts her faithful: "Leaving the glorious miracle of Bethlehem, let us quickly hasten to the Jordan with an ardent spirit; there we shall witness an awesome mystery..." (Exapostilarion of Matins of the 3rd of January). That awesome mystery is the mystery of the Theophany of the Lord, the self-revelation of God at the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ in the river Jordan. In this mystery Jesus Christ reveals himself as the Messiah and Saviour. As Christ is baptized, the voice of his heavenly Father bears witness to the divine mission of Jesus: "You are my beloved Son, in you I am well pleased." (Mark 1,11) The Holy Spirit bears witness to him by descending upon him in the form of a dove. St. John the Baptist also bears witness as he points to him, saying: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." (John 1,29)

The feast of the Theophany of our Lord is among the most ancient and greatest feasts of our Ecclesiastical Year. The name of this feast, its history, and the revelation of the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity that accompanied it, deserves special consideration here.

### Name of the Feast

In the first centuries of Christianity, the feast of the Theophany was regarded as a collective feast for it embraced other events in the life of Jesus Christ which bore witness to his divinity — namely, his Nativity, the homage of the Wise Men from the East, his baptism, the miracle at Cana of Galilee and the miraculous multiplication of the loaves. Thus our name "Theophany" must be understood in the plural sense for it means a feast of holy Theophanies.



*By Julian Bucmaniuk*

In ancient times, on the feast of the Theophany the solemn baptism of the catechumens took place. This baptism was also called light or enlightenment (illumination), and the catechumens were called "the enlightened". Hence the feast of the Theophany was called Enlightenment or Illumination, the Feast of Lights and Holy Lights, for Jesus came to enlighten all people, "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light; and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death, a light has arisen." (Matthew 4,16) Some authors are of the opinion that this feast was also called the feast of lights because during the baptism of the catechumens the church was lit up with a great number of candles, symbols of the light of the knowledge of the true God.

St. Gregory the Theologian (†389) entitled his sermon on the Theophany: "A sermon on the holy lights of the theophanies of the Lord." He begins it thus: "Again my Jesus and again the mystery...(i.e., again the new feast after the Nativity of Christ), the sublime and divine mystery, which an-

nounces to us heavenly light. For the holy day of lights, which has finally arrived and which we have become worthy to solemnize, had its beginning in the baptism of my Christ 'the true light that enlightens every man that comes into the world.'" (John 1,9) In a subsequent sermon on holy baptism he explains more elaborately what he means by enlightenment: "Yesterday we celebrated the glorious day of lights... and today we shall talk about baptism and its beneficent influence upon us... Enlightenment is a help in our weakness, a putting aside of the body, a seeking after the Spirit, a fellowship with the Word, a renewal of creation, a drowning of sin, a partaking of light, and a dispelling of darkness. Enlightenment is the chariot which raises us to God, making us co-travellers with Christ; it strengthens our faith, perfects our mind, entrusts to us the keys of the kingdom of heaven; changes our lives, frees us from enslavement, loosens our chains, and changes our whole being. Enlightenment, — must I enumerate more? — is the best and most exalted of God's gifts... This gift, just as its giver, Christ, is called by many names... We call it a gift, grace, baptism, anointing, enlightenment, the garment of incorruptibility, bath of regeneration, a seal and all that is for us worthy of honor."

The Western Church in ancient times called the Lord's Theophany the day of the manifestation or manifestations, and in celebrating this day she solemnized the following events: the manifestation of the star, the homage of the Wise Men, the baptism of Jesus and the miracle at Cana of Galilee. St. Augustine (†430) in his sermon on the Epiphany said: "Today we celebrate the mystery of the Epiphany on earth. Today God, by means of a star in the heavens, heralded his Nativity; and by baptism in the Jordan, he sanctified water for the renewal of mankind; at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, he changed water into wine; and with five loaves of bread he fed five thousand people."

### **The History of the Development of the Feast**

In the Eastern Church the feast of the Theophany, except for the feasts of the Pasch and the Descent of the Holy Spirit, is one of the oldest festivals. This feast was first celebrated at the end of the second or at the start of the third century. St. Clement of Alexandria (†215) mentions it in his works. The



Apostolic Constitutions, a work of the fourth century, speak of this festival thus: "Let them celebrate the feast of the Theophany, for on that day Christ's divinity was revealed, which was confirmed by the Father at his baptism, and by the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove pointing to Christ." In the third century, St. Hyppolitus of Rome (†c235) and St. Gregory the Wonderworker of Neocaesarea (†270) mention it in the church services; and in the fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine and other Fathers of the Church preached on this festival.

The feast of the Theophany later spread from the East to the West. The Calendar of Philocalus of the year 354 did not as yet have the feast of the Theophany. In 361 it is already celebrated in Gaul, (modern France); in 383 in northern Italy, then in Spain, in the time of St. Augustine in Northern Africa and about the year 400 in Rome.

The Holy Fathers and preachers of the Western Church such as Paulinus of Noli, Chrysologus of Ravenna, and Isidore of Seville, on the feast of the Theophany emphasize more and more the homage of the Wise Men. In time, in the West the 6th of January became the feast of the Three Kings, and the commemoration of the baptism of Christ was transferred to the 13th of January.

Regarding the history of the celebration of the feast of the Theophany in the East, we may distinguish three periods. In the first period, throughout the third century, the feast included the Nativity of Christ, his Baptism, the homage of the Wise Men and the miracle in Cana of Galilee. In the second period, during the fourth century, among the abovementioned events, the Nativity of Christ held first place. During the third period, toward the end of the fourth century, the feast of the Nativity of Christ and the homage of the Wise Men became separated from the feast of the Theophany and were transferred to the 25th of December. January 6th became the day on which only the Baptism of Christ was commemorated. The feast of the Theophany during the reign of Theodosius the Younger (†450) became a state holiday.

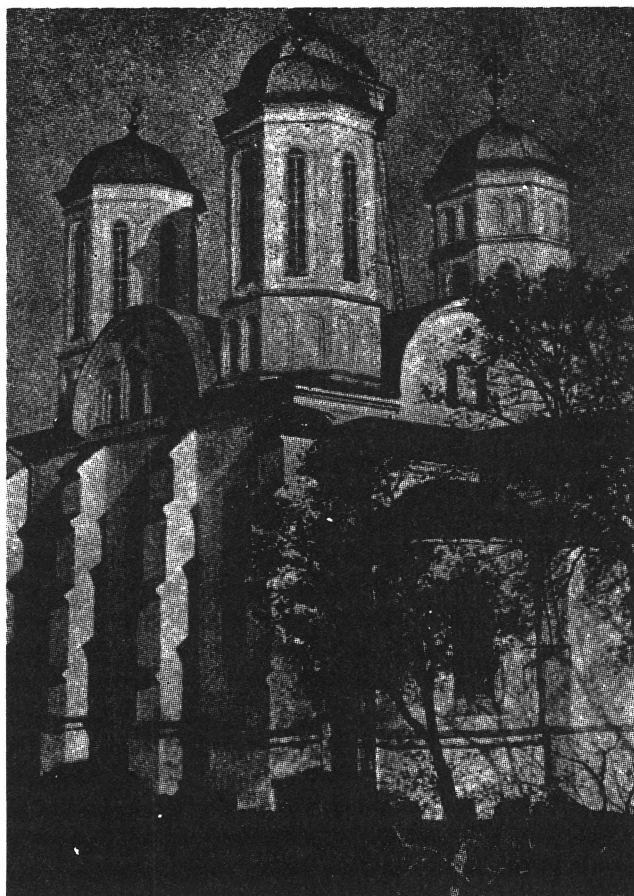
In the Eastern Church this feast is one of the twelve principal feasts. The Apostolic Constitutions say in regard to the Theophany: "Let the day on which the Lord revealed his divinity be held among you in high respect." It has a four-day pre- and an eight-day post-feast. Anatolus of Constantinople

(5c), Sophronius of Jerusalem (7c), Cosmas of Maiuma, John Damascene, Germanus of Constantinople (8c) and Joseph the Studite (9c), all contributed to the liturgy for this feast.

### **The Feast of the Theophany and the Mystery of the Holy Theophany**

The feast of the Baptism of our Lord places before our eyes one of the greatest and most profound truths of our holy faith — the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. At the baptism of Christ, the Most Holy Trinity was clearly revealed and bore witness to the divinity of Christ. In the Third Hour (Terce) of the Vigil of the feast we read: “The Trinity, our God, revealed himself to us today as free from division; for the Father uttered the clear testimony to his Son, the Spirit descended from heaven in the likeness of a dove, and the Son bowed his pure head to the Forerunner, and being baptized, saved mankind from bondage, since he is the Lover of mankind.” In one of the sticheras in the Lytiya service of the feast we sing: “Seeing you, O Christ God, coming to him in the river Jordan, John said: ‘Why do you, who are undefiled, come to a servant, O Lord? In whose name shall I baptize you? Of the Father? But you bear Him within You! Of the Son? But You are this Son made flesh! Of the Holy Spirit? But You know that through Your own mouth You give Him to the faithful! O Triune God, here revealed, have mercy on us.’”

Our Slavonic Prologue on the 6th day of January contains a profound sermon on the Baptism of Jesus Christ by St. Proclus, Patriarch of Constantinople. He puts into the mouth of St. John the Baptist, the following words expressing the faith of holy Church in the divinity of Christ: “How dare I stretch forth my hand and place it on the head of Him who sustains all things? How dare I touch Him before whom the choirs of angels tremble? How dare I approach him whom the Seraphim dare not come near? Hence with awe they cry: holy, holy, holy. Truly heaven is filled with your glory and the earth with your wonders. How dare I approach the Unapproachable One before whom tremble the Cherubim and all the heavenly hosts? How dare I baptize the Creator of nature? How dare I baptize him to whom the Pure Virgin Mary gave birth and after giving birth remained a virgin?... I can only say: You, O Lord, are the Master, I, the servant; You are the Creator, I, the



*Church of the Theophany (16th c.)*

creature. You are the Sun, I the star; You are the Shepherd, I the sheep; You are the King, I the soldier; You are the light, I the candlestick. You are the Archpriest, and I an earthling... I am a mortal, but you are Immortal... And John touching the most pure head of the Lord, baptized One of the Holy Trinity. Immediately he saw heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descending and coming upon him."

St. Gregory the Theologian in a sermon on the holy lights of the Lord's theophanies gives a sketch of the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity: "God is divided, so to speak, in an undivided manner, and unites in a divided manner because the Divini-

ty is one in Three Persons and the One is Three, in which Three is the Divinity, or to be more exact, which Three are the Divinity... The Father is the Father and is eternal because he has no beginning from another. The Son is the Son, and is not without beginning because he is from the Father. However, if you understand beginning in relation to time, then the Son also is without beginning because the Creator of time is not subject to time. The Spirit is indeed the Holy Spirit who emanates not through birth but through origin."

St. John Chrysostom encourages us to have faith in the Most Holy Trinity: "Our faith — is the throne of the soul, the foundation of life, the immortal root. The life-giving root of faith — is the Father; the unwithering branch — the Son; the immortal fruit — the Holy Spirit; that is, the Trinity — simple, uncomplicated, unspeakable, incomprehensible, undivided in identity, in dignity, action, Divinity and grandeur; however, divided — in Persons and names, but One in essence and powers. The Trinity exists from eternity. Its existence had no beginning. It is without beginning; it is eternal, ageless, immortal, without end."

Each day our holy Church begins Matins service with a sublime doxology in honor of the Most Holy Trinity: "Glory be to the holy, consubstantial (one in substance) Life-giving and Undivided Trinity, always, now and ever, and forever."



# Feast of the Three Hierarchs

*“The Church is celebrating today the distinguished feast of the three Teachers, for they strengthened the Church by their divine dogmas.”*

*(Sessional of the Matins service of the Feast)*

On the 30th of January we celebrate the memory of three great and very outstanding bishops, teachers, preachers and Fathers of the Eastern Church: St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom. Among our people this feast is known as the feast of the “Three Saints”. These three hierarchs-bishops were giants of faith, courage, holiness and learning. They handed down to us the pure faith of the Council of Nicea; they expounded the dogmas of the Holy Trinity, Christ’s divinity and the Holy Eucharist. Because of their great merits, in her liturgy our Eastern Church calls them peers of the Apostles, instruments of the Holy Spirit, pillars of the Church and universal teachers of the whole world. All three lived in the fourth century — the golden age of the Christian faith. St. Basil and St. Gregory were sons of Cappadocia in Asia Minor, intimate friends of approximately the same age. St. John Chrysostom, an Antiochian, was younger than the other two by twenty years. Apostolic zeal for the holy faith and salvation of souls united them.

## Outstanding Features of the Three Hierarchs

### St. Basil the Great (329-279)

The parents and grandparents of St. Basil the Great were distinguished patricians, influential and fearless champions of the holy faith. Basil’s singular abilities and unusually keen mind, his insatiable desire for learning and his ample financial means, gave him access to the finest schools of learning and the most renowned professors of his time. The British

historian, F. Farrar, describes St. Basil in this way: "His features and bearing, his slender form, his pale countenance, his keen eye, and grave manner — bore witness to his noble birth. The natural excellence of his character rendered his enemies shy, but attracted his friends. He was a born leader who by Christian humility overcame, with difficulty, his natural consciousness of his own superiority." (Lives of the Fathers, Vol. II)

The Servant of God Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky, O.S.B.M., in his introduction to the "Ascetical Works of Our Father St. Basil the Great" describes St. Basil thus: "Basil was a man who had acquired a well-rounded education in all branches of contemporary learning; he was an excellent orator, an unparalleled expert in Holy Scriptures, an eminent dogmatist and polemicist in his battle against the Arians."

St. Basil by nature was an ascetic and theologian. As the archbishop of Caesarea, he shone forth as a heroic defender of the holy faith, an efficient organizer, excellent orator, distinguished writer, reformer of liturgical services, zealous protector of orphans and the poor, and an outstanding legislator of communal monastic life. Because of his merits, holy Church bestowed upon him the title "Great". Our Church recalls his memory on January first, the day of his death.

### **St. Gregory the Theologian (c.326-290)**

St. Gregory was named for his father who was a bishop in Nazianzen, in Cappodocia. Before he was even born, his pious mother, Nonna, made a vow to offer him up to the service of God. After he had grown to manhood, she gave him the Holy Bible, saying, "As I promised even before your birth, I now offer you to God; I beg you, therefore, to fulfill my desire. You were born as a result of my prayers. For this I now pray, that you be perfect. I entrust to you, my son, this precious treasure. Use it throughout your entire life, and in the future you shall receive still more blessings."

St. Gregory, like St. Basil, received a thorough education in the higher schools of learning. On his way to study in Athens, his ship was caught in a fierce storm at sea. At the time, he had not yet been baptized, and fearing lest he die without holy baptism, he made a vow that if he came out of the storm safely, he would consecrate himself to the service of

God. In Athens, he met St. Basil and they became faithful friends and remained so throughout their entire lives. St. Gregory speaks briefly about their life in Athens: "We knew only two roads — one to church to pray, the other to school to study."

His father ordained him to the priesthood, and later St. Basil appointed him Bishop of Sasima. St. Gregory was the Archbishop of Constantinople for several years. He distinguished himself as a profound preacher; his sermons are pearls and masterpieces of sacred eloquence. St. Gregory had great devotion to the Holy Trinity, regarding that dogma as the foundation of the Christian religion. Because of his deep knowledge of theology he received the title "the Theologian". In Byzantium, he was called the Christian Demosthenes.



*The Three Hierarchs (16th c.)*

St. Gregory was by nature quiet, tender, sensitive and compassionate. He always dreamed of a life of prayer and contemplation in solitude. As a writer he left sermons, poems and letters for posterity. He penned a sublime funeral oration in honor of his friend, St. Basil, and his father, Gregory. We celebrate the memory of his death on January 25.

### **St. John Chrysostom (347-407)**

St. John Chrysostom was born in Antioch and labored there for many years as a zealous priest and an untiring evangelist. Preaching was an inseparable part of his life and soul. "I cannot allow one day to go by," he said to his congregation, "without offering you nourishment from the treasures of Holy Scripture. "Although he was frail, nevertheless, he seemed to acquire new strength every time he ascended the pulpit to preach. He himself speaks of this: "Preaching makes me healthy. As soon as I open my mouth, all fatigue leaves me." He captivated great throngs of people by his sermons. Most of his homilies were Scripture-oriented, and in these he beautifully explains many parts of both the Old and New Testaments. For his ardent and moving sermons he received the title "Chrysostom=Golden-Mouthed". St. John Chrysostom as priest and bishop was completely dedicated to his Church and to his faithful. He was a great friend and protector of the poor, widows and orphans. Because of his illustrious talents, he was raised to the archbishop's throne in the capital city of Constantinople.

St. John Chrysostom was a zealous and completely dedicated pastor, a magnificent speaker, and a great teacher of faith and morals. He left over 800 sermons, a book on the priesthood, and numerous letters. In our native land of Rus-Ukraine, during the period of the Kievan State, no other sermons were so widely known and read as his. Many translations and selections from his sermons appeared during the pre-Mongolian period, under such names as, "Zlatoust" (the golden-mouthed), "Zlatostruj" (golden-stream), "Izmaragd" (Greek=emerald), "Marharyt" (Greek=pearl). The Collection of Prince Sviatoslav (1033) contains selections from the works of John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, Athanasius the Great, Gregory of Nyssa and others. We





*A traditionally Ukrainian wooden church of the Sacred Heart,  
Johnson City, N.Y.*

celebrate the memory of St. John Chrysostom twice a year: on November 13th, the day of his death, and on January 27th, the translation of his relics.

### **The Institution of this Feast**

The feast of the Three Hierarchs is one of the very recent feasts of the Greek Church. A great dispute in the second half of the eleventh century gave rise to the institution of this

feast. This controversy arose among Christians over which of these three Saints contributed the most to the Church. Some thought St. Basil to be the greatest, others, St. Gregory the Theologian, still others, St. John Chrysostom. Those who were advocates of St. Basil were called Basilians, those of St. Gregory — Gregorians, and those of St. John Chrysostom — Joanites. This dispute was settled by the three bishops themselves. Each one separately, and later all three together, appeared to John, Bishop of the city of Euchaita (a suburb of Constantinople), who was known for his wisdom, learning and virtue, and said: "We, as you can see, are one before God and there is nothing between us that is contrary or controversial; each one of us, differently inspired by the Holy Spirit, taught that which was necessary for the salvation of man. Therefore, there is no first or second among us, but as you call one so shall the others be called. Arise, then, and command those who are arguing over us, not to divide themselves, for as during life, so too after death, our goal is to bring peoples from all corners of the earth to peace and unity. Institute, therefore, the celebration of our memory on the same day, as all three of us are of the same rank before God, and we shall help those to achieve salvation, who shall celebrate our memory."

In 1076, Bishop John did as the three bishops commanded him. However, because holy Church already celebrated the memory of each one separately, he designated the 30th of January as the day for their common feast. In addition to this, he had a sermon in their honor, and composed troparions, canons and sticheras. Our chronicles at the end of 1076 mention the institution of this feast in Greece.

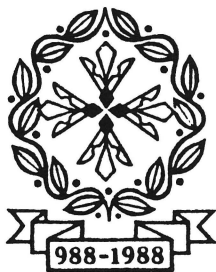
### **The Three Hierarchs in the Service of the Feast**

The service of the feast beautifully praises and glorifies the Three Hierarchs for their fervent love of God and neighbor, their unwavering faith, their significance for holy Church, their illustrious virtues, wisdom and intercession. "Basil — divine intellect," we sing in the aposticha of the Small vespers service, "Gregory — divine voice, John — most beautiful lamp. May they be glorified, these three distinguished representatives and ministers of the Trinity." In the aposticha of the Solemn or Great Vespers service we sing: "O instruments of the Holy Spirit, and trumpets of divine

thunder, O lightnings of preaching, O golden, light-bearing, resplendent lamps of God: O most blessed Basil, O most wise Gregory and O most venerable John, implore Christ our God to save those who honor you."

In the sticheras of Vespers, Matins, and in the canons we find eulogistic and lofty expressions and parallels with which the Church expresses its admiration, respect, praise and veneration of the Three Hierarchs. Here are some of the expressions: "men of God", "chosen vessels", "pillars and support of the Church", "defenders of the Trinity, fortresses of piety", "divine and wise teachers", "instruments of the Holy Spirit, veritable trumpets, orators of the word", "earthly angels, heavenly men", "distinguished vessels of the Spirit, solid defenders of the faith, pillars of the Church, support of the faithful, consolation of all sinners", "oceanic streams, overflowing fountains, living-water pouring forth, limpid gems, earthly luminaries, ecclesiastical helmsmen, trees rich in fruit, treasures of grace, mouths of Christ."

Having before her eyes their greatness, merits and significance before God, holy Church invokes the faithful to give fit praise to the Three Hierarchs: "Having come together with songs of praise, O lovers of feasts, let us praise Christ's sanctifiers and the glory of the Fathers, the pillars of the faith, teachers and defenders of the faithful. Let us hail each of them in turn: Hail, luminary of the Church, immutable pillar, O wise Basil! Hail, O heavenly mind and great hierarch, Gregory the Theologian! Hail, O golden-voiced John, splendid preacher of penance. O spiritually-wealthy fathers, never cease to pray to Christ in behalf of those who with faith and love observe your sacred and sublime feast."



# Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord Jesus Christ

*“Rejoice, O Mother of God, full of  
grace, for from you has shone forth  
the Sun of justice, Christ our God,  
who enlightens all who are in dark-  
ness...” (Troparion of the Feast)*

The Christmas cycle of feasts concludes with the feast of the Presentation of our Lord on February 2nd, the fortieth day after the Nativity of Christ. This feast is closely connected with the Nativity of our Lord, for just as Christ's divinity was revealed at his Nativity, so it is also manifested at his presentation in the Temple. From the meeting of the Divine Child and his most Holy Mother with the just Simeon, the feast in the Eastern Church receives its name “The Meeting or Encounter”. Here we shall consider the origin of the feast, its institution and the spirit of its service.

## The Basis of the Feast

The feast of the Presentation or the Encounter is based on an event from the life of our Saviour, recorded in the Gospel of St. Luke (2,22-40). The law of Moses prescribed that every woman who gave birth to a male child was excluded from the temple for forty days, for during that time she was regarded as impure. These forty days were called “days of purification”. When this period of purification was ended, the mother of the newly born child went to the temple and offered a year old lamb as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or turtle dove, while a poor woman had to offer a pair of pigeons or a pair of turtle doves. The most Pure Virgin Mary, being the Mother of God, was not bound to submit to this rite of purification, for she was sanctified by the birth of Christ, as our kontakion

stresses: "You, O Christ, sanctified the Virgin's womb by your birth." Nevertheless, in her humility, she fulfilled the prescription of the law and offered as a sacrifice two turtle doves.

In addition to this, another rite was performed over the firstborn male on the fortieth day — the rite of offering him up to God and his subsequent redemption. He who was to sanctify and redeem all mankind, desired that he, himself, first be consecrated to God and then redeemed. "The Eternal God," says the stichera of Lytiya, "who of old gave the law to Moses on Sinai appears this day as an infant. The Creator of the law fulfills the Law. He is brought into the temple and given over to the elder."

Here the providential meeting or encounter of the Divine Child and his most Pure Mother with the righteous Simeon merits special consideration. St. Luke relates that Simeon "was just and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord." (2,25-26) Through divine inspiration Simeon recognizes the Child Jesus as the Messiah. He takes him into his arms and with a beautiful prayer blesses the Lord God for the grace of seeing with his own eyes the Promised Redeemer. Our Church always concludes the Vespers service with the prayer of Simeon "Now you may dismiss..." Meanwhile, the aged Simeon predicts to the Most Holy Mother of God her forthcoming sacrifice and suffering because of Jesus Christ.

### **The Institution of the Feast**

The feast of the Presentation or the Encounter originated in Jerusalem in the second half of the fourth century. First mention of it is made by the pilgrim Silvia Egeria in her Diary, where she calls it "the fortieth day after the Epiphany". She describes its celebration in the following words: "The fortieth day after Epiphany is indeed celebrated here with the greatest solemnity. On that day there is a procession into the Anastasis (Church of the Resurrection), and all assemble there for the Divine Liturgy; everything is performed in the prescribed manner with the greatest solemnity, just as on Easter Sunday. All the priests give sermons, as does the bishop

also; all preach on the Gospel text describing how on the fortieth day Joseph and Mary took the Lord to the temple, and how Simeon and Ann, the prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, saw him, and what words they spoke on seeing the Lord, and the offering which his parents brought.” (26)

From Jerusalem the feast spread throughout the entire East, but only in the sixth century under the Emperor Justinian (527-565) did it assume special significance. Emperor Justinian ordered that the feast of the Presentation or Encounter be regarded as a great feast and celebrated throughout the entire Empire. For this reason, in the service of this feast the Church prays several times for the emperor.

The motives for the solemn celebration of the feast of the Presentation were two extraordinary events: a plague in Constantinople and vicinity, and an earthquake in Antioch. At the end of the year 541 a plague, from which people died daily by the thousands, afflicted Constantinople and its surrounding districts. This plague lasted for three months. In addition to this, a great earthquake occurred in Antioch. Tradition reports that, at the time, a certain holy man received a revelation from God that the disaster which had befallen the nation would cease when the solemn celebration of the Lord's Presentation had been instituted. The emperor ordered the feast of the Presentation to be solemnly observed and the plague ceased.

From the East, the feast of the Presentation passed over to Rome in the fifth century, and from there it spread to France and Spain in the seventh century, and then to Germany in the eighth century. Some ascribe its institution in the West to Pope Gelasius (†496), while others attribute it to Pope Gregory the Great (†604). Pope Sergius (687-701) is believed to have introduced the custom of holding a procession with candles on this feast, a custom which quickly spread from Rome to Jerusalem and other cities in Palestine. Cyril of Scythopolis (†557) in his “Life of St. Theodosius the Great” relates that a wealthy wife of a Roman official, named Icalia, built a beautiful church between Jerusalem and Bethlehem in honor of the Most Holy Mother of God and there introduced the custom of celebrating the feast of the Presentation with candles. The Patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius (†c.641), speaks of this custom also in his sermon on the feast of the



*By Julian Bucmaniuk*

Presentation. The light of the candles is a beautiful symbol of the true light of God — our Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Carrying candles in procession on the feast of the Presentation seems to have been practiced earlier in Alexandria. In his sermon on the bringing of the Child Jesus to the temple, Cyril of Alexandria (†444) mentions the carrying of candles on that day. Theodotus of Ancyra (†446) speaks of the same custom being practiced in Ancyra. Blessing candles on the feast of the Presentation became a custom only after the tenth century. First mention of it is made in the Roman-German Missal of the twelfth century.

In the West, the feast of the Presentation originally was counted as a feast of our Lord; only at a much later date was it recognized as a Marian feast designated as, "The Purification of the Most Pure Virgin Mary", or "The Offering of Jesus in

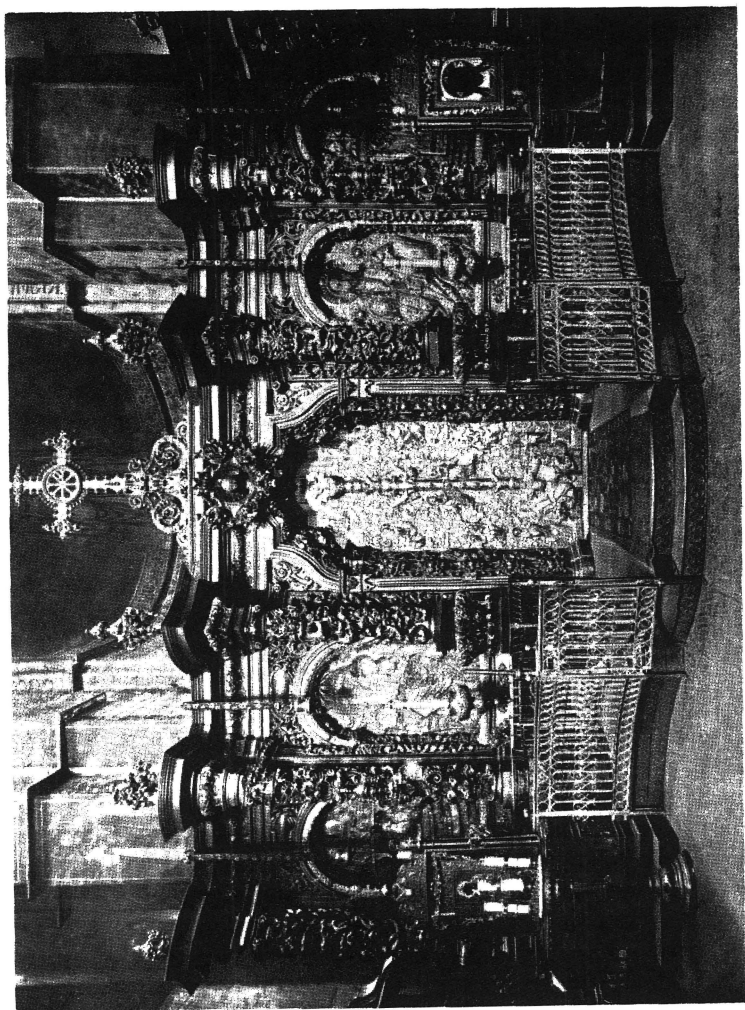
the Temple". The most recent prescriptions of the Latin Church promulgated at the Second Vatican Council again place the feast of the Presentation among the Lord's feasts, designated as "The Offering of Jesus in the Temple".

In the Eastern Church, the feast of the Presentation is celebrated as a Marian feast and is sometimes called, "The Meeting (or Encounter) of the Most Holy Mother of God". This feast has a one-day pre-feast and a seven-day post-feast. Many Fathers and Doctors of the Eastern Church have sermons for this feast, and St. Andrew of Crete, St. John Damascene, St. Cosmas of Maiuma, Patriarch of Germanus and Joseph the Studite all have contributed to the liturgy of this feast. The Church solemnizes the memory of the Just Simeon and Anna on the day following the feast of the Presentation.

### **The Spirit of the Service of the Feast**

The Spirit of the feastday service is the same as that of the Nativity of our Lord and the Theophany: to glorify the Theophany (manifestation of God) on earth, to extol the Divinity of Christ and give honor to the Most Pure Virgin Mary as the Mother of God. St. Cyril of Alexandria speaks beautifully of the profound content and significance of this feast in his sermon for this day: "The Eternal," he says, "is both a small Child and the 'Ancient of Days' (i.e., God). A Child at the breast and at the same time the Creator of ages. I behold a Child and recognize God. The Child is nourished and at the same time sustains the universe. The Child weeps and at the same time he gives life and joy to the world. The Child is in swaddling clothes and at the same time he delivers me from the bonds of sin... This Child — the angels glorify him, the archangels bow before him. The Principalities tremble in his presence, the Powers praise him, the Cherubim minister to him, the Seraphim bless him, the sun praises him, the moon serves him, nature obeys him, fountains and seas yield to him... This Child conquered death, overcame the devil, abolished Adam's curse,...washed away all sins, condemned all heresy, adorned all creation, saved Adam, renewed Eve, summoned all the nations and sanctified the universe... Therefore, let us all go forth to greet the Presentation of our Lord with splendor... Therefore, let us brighten this day with





*Iconostasis in St. Sophia Cathedral in Kiev, 1747.*

candles, as befits the children of light, and let us bring to Christ the Light of spiritual illumination.” (Prologue, I)

The sticheras of Vespers, the Sessional hymns, the canon and the sticheras of the Matins service form one magnificent hymn of glory in honor of Christ’s Theophany (manifestation), celebrating the Incarnation of the Eternal Word of God, and extolling the Most Holy Mother of God. The small child, brought to the temple by his parents, is the Eternal God who gave the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai: “He who once gave the Law to Moses on Sinai,” we sing in the sticheras of Lytiya, “today submits himself to the prescriptions of the Law, in his compassion, he has become like unto us for our sakes... Today Simeon takes into his arms the Lord of glory, whom Moses once saw in darkness, when on Sinai God gave him the tablets... The Creator of heaven and earth today is carried in the arms of the old Simeon.”

The Child we see today in the temple is the Messiah sent by God and foretold by the prophets: “O Simeon, tell us whom you are joyfully carrying into the temple. To whom are you saying: Now you may dismiss your servant, O Lord, because my eyes have seen my Saviour? He is the child born of the Virgin. He is the Word, God of God! O Lord, who for our sake was incarnate and saved mankind, to you we bow in worship.”

And the Mother of the Child brought to the temple is the Most Holy Mother of God: “Adorn your bridal chamber, O Sion and welcome Christ the King,” says the stichera of the aposticha in the Vespers service, “welcome Mary, the gate of heaven, for she has appeared as a cherubic throne on which the King of Glory is seated.” The Most Pure Virgin Mary is not only the Mother of Christ, but also our hope and our Mediatrix. In the ninth Ode of the canon of Matins, we entreat her: “O Virgin Mother of God, Hope of all Christians, protect, watch over, and guard all those who put their hope in you... O Virgin Mother of God, good helper of the world, protect and preserve us from every care and worry.”

Holy Church, seeing the great mystery of the Theophany and the love of God towards us, calls upon the faithful to give glory to Christ the Lord: “Let the choir of angels be amazed at this wonder, and let us mortal men raise our voices in song,

beholding the ineffable condescension of God. Aged arms now embrace him before whom the powers of heaven tremble, he who alone loves mankind. (Sessional Hymn, Matins)



# **The Feast of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Mother of God**

*“With the voice of the Archangel we cry  
out to you, O Most Pure One: ‘Rejoice,  
O full of grace, the Lord is with you.’”  
(Hymn of Praise of the Feast)*

“Today is the beginning of our salvation and the revelation of the eternal mystery: the Son of God becomes the Son of a Virgin.” (Troparion of the Feast). Thus, with a song of praise our Church greets the feast of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Mother of God, calling it the beginning of our salvation. And justifiably, for this feast is one of the most important feasts of our Ecclesiastical Year. The very title of the feast, found in our liturgical books, indicates its importance: “The Annunciation of our Most Holy Queen, the Mother of God and Most Pure Virgin Mary.”

St. Athanasius the Great (†373), in his sermon on the Annunciation, calls this feast the first in the list of feasts, for it begins the work of salvation of the human race. The basis for this feast is the joyful annunciation recorded in St. Luke (1, 26-38). The Annunciation is first in a whole series of great mysteries in the life of Jesus Christ and his Most Holy Mother. The feast of the Annunciation is not only one of the twelve greatest feastdays of our Church, but its service is taken even if it should fall on Palm Sunday, Great Friday or on the feast of the Resurrection (Easter day).

## **The Significance of the Mystery of the Annunciation**

The mystery of the Annunciation has fundamental significance, for with it begin the New Testament and our salvation. Mankind had waited thousands of years for the



*Holy Virgin (detail). Mosaic in the Cathedral of St. Sophia,  
Kiev. 11th Cent.*

good news of the Archangel concerning the incarnation of the Son of God. Heaven, earth, and the righteous souls in limbo awaited this good news. On this day God fulfilled his promise to send a redeemer, for on this day the "Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1, 14) In a sermon on the Annunciation, attributed to St. John Chrysostom, we read: "Gabriel was sent to reveal the salvation of the world. Gabriel was sent to bring to Adam the promise of his return from slavery to sin. Gabriel was sent to the Virgin, to restore the honor of womanhood. Gabriel was sent to prepare a worthy bridal chamber for the pure Bridegroom. Gabriel was sent to espouse creature with the Creator. Gabriel was sent to the living palace of the King of angels. Gabriel was sent to the Virgin betrothed to Joseph, but preserved for the Son. The bodiless servant was sent to the pure Virgin. The one who was free from sin was sent to one exempt from corruption. A lamp was sent to point out the Sun of truth. Morning was sent to precede the light of day. Gabriel was sent to announce Him, who is in the bosom of the Father and in the arms of the Mother. Gabriel was sent to announce Him, Who is seated on a throne at God's right hand and, at the same time, rests in a lowly manger on earth." (Works, Vol. 8, p. 854)

In the instruction which the Prologue gives for this day, we read the following concerning the significance of the mystery: "Today the Son and Word of God, Lord and God, silently places himself in the womb of the Virgin, desiring by his incarnation to deify man and the work of his hands, and to lead him back to the ancient paradise. Today the Uncreated dwells in his creature. Today the invisible becomes visible. Today the inaccessible One is conceived in the virgin womb and becomes eminently accessible. Today the Word of God receives a body, the Son of God becomes the Son of a Virgin... Today the gates of paradise are opened, and the fiery sword that drove our first parents from Paradise is quickly withdrawn and the human race, through faith in Christ and good deeds, again enters into paradise with joy. Today Adam rejoices, having received into his nature his Creator. Today Eve, having crushed the head of the serpent, her implacable tempter, calls upon the whole world to rejoice, saying: "Rejoice with me, for today we have found inexpressible joy and deliverance from all sin."

At the moment of the angel's annunciation, the Son of



*By Michael Dmytrenko*

God begins the first moments of earthly life in the womb of the Most Pure Virgin Mary. From this momentous fact the privileges of Mary — those of divine motherhood and virginity — clearly emanate.

### **The History of the Feast**

The celebration of the feast of the Annunciation began in the Eastern Church at the end of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century. Emperor Mauricius (582-602) made this feast obligatory throughout the entire empire. At first, both in the East and the West, it was considered a feast of the Lord as is evident from the names by which it was first known: "The Conception of Christ", "The Annunciation concerning Christ", "The Beginning of Redemption", "The Annunciation", "The Annunciation of the Angel to Mary", "The Day of the Salutation", "The Day or Feast of the Annunciation". In the seventh century, the name was formally established for the entire Eastern Church as "The Annunciation of the Most Holy Mother of God", and it was decreed that this feast be celebrated as a Marian feast.

The date, March 25, was selected for this feast because it occurs just nine months before the feast of the Nativity of our Lord on December 25. In addition to this, there existed an ancient tradition that March 25th marked not only the incarnation of the Son of God, but also both the creation of the world and the death of Christ on the Cross. The Alexandrian Paschal Chronicle of 624, and also the Paschal Chronicle of Constantinople, from the start of the seventh century, places the feast of the Annunciation on the 25th of March.

The liturgy for this feast was composed by St. John Damascene, St. Cosmas of Maiuma, Theophane, Bishop of Nicea and the monk John. On the day following the feast, the Eastern Church celebrates the "Synaxis of St. Gabriel Archangel". This is an ancient custom of the Eastern Church to pay honor after some great feast to those persons who had played an outstanding role in the event celebrated by the feast.

The feast of the Annunciation came to the West from the East somewhere between the years 660 and 680. Just as in the East, so here too, it was at first considered a feast of the Lord and had various names, such as: "The Lord's Annunciation", "The Conception of Christ", "The Feast of the Incarnation",



“The Annunciation of the Angel to the Most Pure Virgin Mary”, “The Annunciation of Holy Mary concerning the Conception”. The Council of Toledo in the year 656 speaks of the Annunciation as being celebrated on the 25th of March, but transfers it to the 18th of December. The reason for this was that according to an ancient tradition no feast could be celebrated during the Great Fast, and also because it seemed fitting that the feast of the Annunciation be closer to the feast of the Nativity of Christ than to the death and Resurrection. Not until the eleventh century did all the Churches in the West again begin to celebrate the Annunciation on the 25th of March. The Armenians observe the Annunciation on the 7th of April because they observe the Nativity of Christ and the Theophany together on the same day, the 6th of January. The event of the Annunciation is a cherished theme in iconography.

The feast of the Annunciation in Rus-Ukraine was the second Marian feast after the Assumption, to which a church in Kiev was dedicated in the first century of Christianity. Prince Jaroslav the Wise built a church upon the golden gates in Kiev in honor of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Mother of God. “In the year 1037,” says our oldest chronicle, “Jaroslav founded the great city of Kiev, which has golden gates. He also built the church of St. Sophia (the Wisdom of God), which was the church of the Metropolitan and then built the stone church of the Annunciation of the Holy Mother of God upon the golden gates. The most wise Prince Jaroslav built the church of the Annunciation upon the Golden Gates so that joy may always reign in the city through the Annunciation of the Lord and the Prayer of the Mother of God and Archangel Gabriel.” In the church of the Annunciation, Prince Jaroslav the Wise consecrated the whole Ukrainian nation to the patronage of the Mother of God in 1037.

### **The Spirit of the Service of the Feast of the Annunciation**

The liturgy of this feast is filled with glorious and joyful hymns. The well known greeting of the angel is repeated numerous times: “Rejoice!” The reason for this holy and unearthly joy is the incarnation of the Son of God, the privilege of the Divine Motherhood and Virginity of Mary, and

the redemption of mankind. Heaven, earth and all creation share in the joy of the Annunciation. "Today is the joyous Annunciation," we sing at the aposticha of Vespers, "the feast of virginity. The creatures of earth unite with those of heaven. Adam is renewed and Eve is freed from her ancient sorrow..." The second Sessional Hymn of Matins says: "Today all creation rejoices, for the Archangel says to you: You are the blessed, precious and most Pure Mother of Christ God..." The Canon of the Matins services is unique in that it is arranged in the form of a dialogue between the Most Holy Mother of God and the Archangel. For example: "The Mother of God: — 'Having heard the joyful voice of your words, Gabriel, I was filled with divine joy, for you proclaim joy and announce infinite happiness.'" "The Angel: — 'To you is imparted joy, O divine Mother of God. All creation, O Virgin of God, cries out to you: Rejoice! For you, the only Pure One, was chosen as the Mother of the Son of God.'" (Ode 6)

The Angel speaks to the Most Holy Mother of God with the deepest respect and has for her, the Mother of God, the highest words of praise and admiration: "Gabriel stood in your presence, O handmaiden, and revealed the eternal plan to you. He greeted you and announced: 'Rejoice, O unseeded earth. Rejoice, O unburnt bush, O unfathomable abyss. Rejoice, O bride which leads to heaven, O high ladder which Jacob saw. Rejoice, O vessel of divine manna. Rejoice, O Deliverer from the curse. Rejoice, O salvation of Adam. The Lord is with you!'" (Vespers — stichera for Psalm 140)

The chief source of this joy is the incarnation of the Son of God and our salvation: "... The virginal womb receives the Son, the Holy Spirit is sent down, and the Father on high is well pleased. Through the universal will, reconciliation is effected for all. Let us, who have been saved in it and through it, sing with Gabriel to the Virgin: Rejoice, O full of grace. For our salvation, Christ our God took our human nature from you and joined it to himself. Therefore, implore him to save our souls." (Stichera of the Aposticha in Vespers)

## **Feast of SS. Cyril and Methodius — Apostles of the Slavs**

*“We praise you, O holy Cyril and Methodius, equal-to-the-Apostles, who by your teachings enlightened the Slav nations and led them to Christ.” (Hymn of Praise of the Feast)*

The holy equal-to-the-Apostles Cyril and Methodius, Apostles of the Slavs, are dear to all the Slavs and very close in spirit to our Ukrainian people. To them we owe the light of Christianity among the Slavic peoples. To them we are indebted for the translation of the Bible and the liturgical books into the Slavonic language. To them we are grateful that the Slavonic language became a liturgical language on the same level with Greek and Latin.

SS. Cyril and Methodius were noted for Apostolic zeal in spreading the Christian faith among the Slavs; they were the founders and originators of the Slavonic rite. Therefore, they justifiably deserve to be called “equal-to-the-Apostles” for they were the first teachers and illuminators of the Slavs as well as of our Ukrainian people. In our Ecclesiastical Year we have as many as three days dedicated to their memory.

Let us, therefore, examine their apostolic labors, their significance for the Slavonic Rite and their veneration in our Church.

### **The Apostolic Labors of Cyril and Methodius**

Constantine, whose monastic name is Cyril, and Methodius were born in Thessalonica in the first half of the ninth century, the sons of a high state official of the Byzantine empire. Historians are uncertain of the nationality of

their parents: some say that they were Slavs; others, that the father was a Slav and the mother a Greek; still others, that both parents were Greeks. Since there were many Slavs in Thessalonica, it is probable that Constantine and Methodius already from their youth knew the Slavonic language. They received good Christian training and higher education. Constantine, while still a student, was given the title "philosopher"; later, he taught philosophy at the university in Constantinople. After completing his studies, Methodius served for several years as a state official among the Slavs; later he entered the monastery in Olympus, Bithynia, Asia Minor.

Thus, the Providence of God prepared Methodius and Cyril for their great and holy mission as the apostles of the Slavs.

In 860, the two brothers preached the Christian faith to the Khazars who controlled southern Ukraine by the Black and Caspian Seas. Their mission post was Kherson (now Korsun). On the Crimea, they came in contact with Greeks who had settlements there, as well as with Slavs. In Korsun, Constantine found a Holy Gospel and a Psalter, written in the language of Rus. There he also discovered the relics of Pope St. Clement.

The mission work among the Khazars was for Constantine and Methodius only a prelude to their greatest mission — that of converting the Slavs to the Christian faith. In 862, the Moravian Prince, Rostyslav (846-870), asked the Byzantine Emperor, Michael III (842-867), to send missionaries to preach the Christian faith in his kingdom in the Slavonic language. The choice fell upon the two brothers since they, knowing the Slavonic language, seemed best fitted for such a mission. Cyril was given charge of the mission.

Several years before Cyril received the summons to Moravia, he had invented an alphabet for the Slavonic tongue, adapting the letters of the Greek alphabet to the Slavonic language by adding whatever characters the Greek language lacked. Cyril had also begun to translate the Bible into the Slavonic tongue. For the Moravians, he also translated the Western Mass into their language.

The inhabitants of Moravia and Panonia were happy to receive Cyril and Methodius; now for the first time they were able to hear the divine services in their own tongue. However,

the German missionaries of the Latin Rite were hostile towards them because they maintained that the holy liturgy had to be celebrated in either Hebrew, Greek or Latin. For this reason, they did not wish to acknowledge the use of the Slavonic language in the Liturgy. Although the Apostolic See had sanctioned the mission of the two brothers and their use



of the Slavonic language in the Liturgy, nevertheless they and their disciples encountered many obstacles, and even open persecution from the Latin bishops of the area. Pope Adrian II in 869 consecrated Methodius archbishop of Moravia. Meanwhile, Constantine had gone to Rome where he entered the Greek monastery, assuming the name Cyril; and there he died

on the fourteenth of February, 869. St. Methodius died in Moravia, on the 6th of April, 885. After the death of Methodius, his disciples, under pressure from the Latin Church, were forced to leave Moravia and moved to Bulgaria where they continued their missionary work.

### **Cyril and Methodius — Founders of the Slavonic Rite**

SS. Cyril and Methodius were sent by Divine Providence to the Slavic nations. Their immortal renown among the Slavs is due to the fact that they created the Slavonic Rite. Historians stress the God-given wisdom of St. Cyril, that he did not follow the prevailing custom of using only the Greek or Latin languages in the Liturgy. He firmly maintained the principle that the Lord God can be worshipped in all languages, and therefore, resolved to give to the Slavs the Holy Bible and Liturgy in their native tongue. By introducing the Slavonic language into the Liturgy, Cyril and Methodius became the founders and creators of the Slavonic Rite. Later the Bulgarians took the Slavonic liturgical books from the Moravians and adapted them to their own language, and Rus-Ukraine in turn took them from the Bulgarians. Thus the Bulgarian language became the Church-Slavonic language.

The Ukrainian historian Professor M. Chubatyj draws special attention to the significance of the Slavonic language for our rite, for our people and for the ancient Kievan Rus: "To this day, nowhere has the Christianity of Cyril and Methodius, with a separate Slavonic Rite, survived as a Church entity in the Slavic lands. Nonetheless, this first attempt to create a separate Slavonic Rite, to introduce Slavonic as a liturgical language, and to create a special Slavic alphabet and script had an enormous influence on the religious and cultural life, not so much among the Western Slavs, among whom the Slavonic apostles worked, as among the Eastern and southern Slavs. SS. Cyril and Methodius paved the way for the Slavonic language to become a liturgical language, even though neither the Slavic Rite, nor the Slavonic Glogolic script survived. The Bulgarians using the Cyrillic alphabet, created by the disciples of Cyril and Methodius in Bulgaria as the foundation, and combining with it the Church-Slavonic language of the Macedonian dialect into which the Bible and

liturgical books were translated, began to build on this Church-Slavonic language which was closely akin to the Bulgarian language, their literature, and all their spiritual, religious, ecclesiastical and national life. Besides Bulgaria and Serbia on the south, the ancient state of the Ukrainian people, Kievan Rus, also built her whole spiritual life on this Church-Slavonic language, adapting it to the peculiarities of the language of the Rus-Ukrainian people... The national language of the Rus-Ukrainians at that time is not accurately known to us. However, this Church-Slavonic language which had been in use in the Church, in the administrative offices of Rus-Ukraine, and finally in literature, had gone through the filter of the great-Moravian church experience and had taken root in Rus, and had become the official language of Rus or the Old-Ukrainian language... In Rus it was held that the Church-Slavonic language, which in Eastern Europe replaced the medieval Latin of the West, was the language of Rus, the Ruthenian script, and the Ruthenian translations of the Holy Bible and liturgical books.” (History of Christianity in Rus-Ukraine, Vol. I, pp. 116-118)

The great significance and merits of SS. Cyril and Methodius for the Slavonic peoples is emphasized in the liturgy of their feast. Here our Church praises them as “enlighteners of the Slavs”, “equal-to-the-Apostles”, “apostles and first-bishops of the Slavs”, “zealous promoters of piety”, “sweet-sounding instruments of the Holy Spirit”, “genuine pillars and foundations of the Church, trumpets of the divine teachings of Christ”, “high-soaring eagles, and laborers in Christ’s vineyard”, “most illustrious luminaries”, and “good shepherds”. Their merits and significance for the Slavs are beautifully praised in the Sessional Hymn of the Matins service of their feast: “May the Slavonic races rejoice today. They are splendidly celebrating the sacred memory of the God-wise Bishops. Through them, we now celebrate the Divine Liturgy and all the Church services in our native Slavonic language and through this liturgy they gave us an inexhaustible fountain of spiritual water that flows into eternal life. Freely drinking from it, we shall never cease to magnify you, O Cyril and Methodius. Now that you are happy in the glory of the saints, pray that our souls be saved.”

## **The Cult of Cyril and Methodius in the Slav Lands**

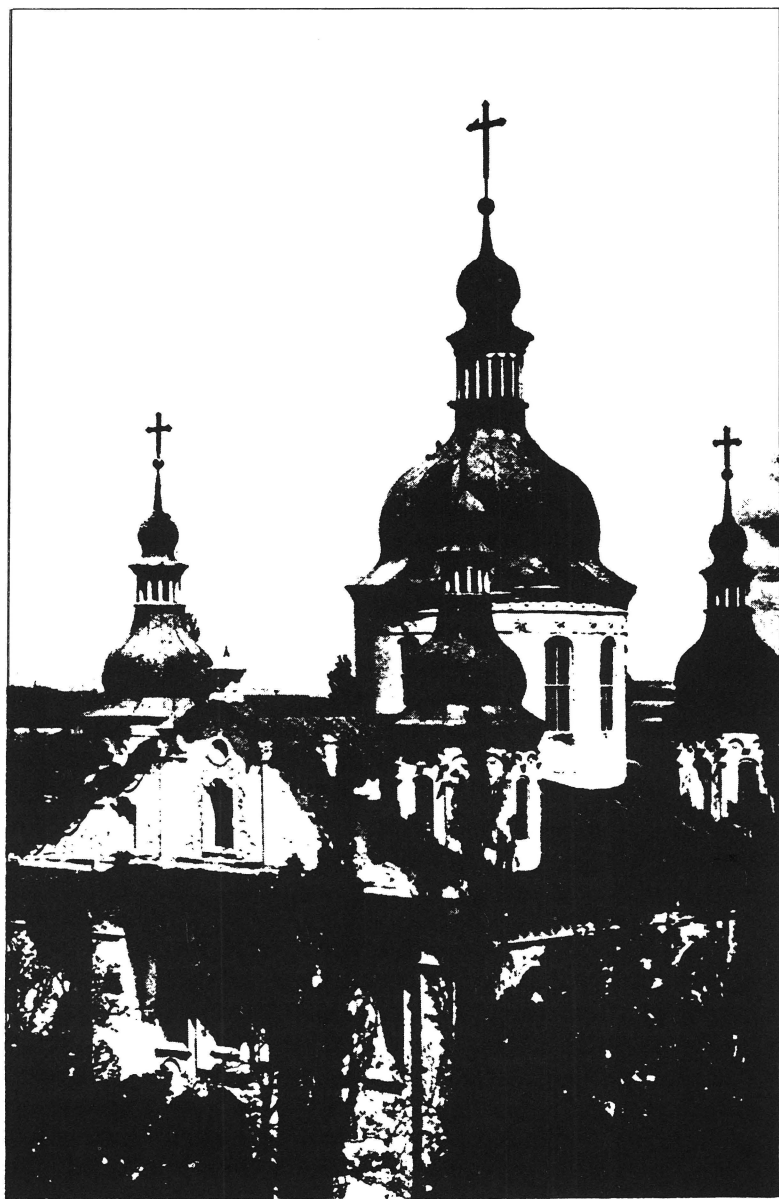
The Slav nations began to venerate their holy Apostles immediately after their death. On the 14th of February the memory of the death of St. Cyril was observed and on the 6th of April the death of St. Methodius. The menaions of our Church of the twelfth century have the service of St. Cyril on the 14th of February and on the 6th of April a feast in honor of both. In earlier times, their memory was honored by all the Slav nations. With the passage of time, however, and because of various historical and political circumstances, their names slowly sank into oblivion.

With the revival of the Slavonic nations in the nineteenth century, the memory of the first-teachers of the Slavs was revived. The Holy Synod of the Russian Church in 1863, on the occasion of the millennium of the Slavonic Gospel, decreed that the memory of both Apostles of the Slavs be observed on May 11. In 1885, on the occasion of the millennium of the death of Methodius, the same Synod decreed that in the prayers of *Lytiya*, at the canon of Matins, and at the dismissals, as well as in the prayers in which the names of the universal Teachers are remembered, the names of SS. Cyril and Methodius also be remembered immediately after the name of St. Nicholas. This Synod also raised the feast of SS. Cyril and Methodius to the rank of a middle-class feast celebrated on May 11th, a feast which may have an all-night vigil service; finally, it decreed that on the anniversary of the death of St. Methodius, April 6, a *polyeleos* service be celebrated. In 1863 and 1885, a special book was published containing the services in honor of SS. Cyril and Methodius.

The Synod of Lviv prescribed that the memory of SS. Cyril and Methodius be observed on July 5 because Pope Leo XIII in his decree of the 30th of September, 1880, commanded the entire Catholic Church to commemorate our holy Apostles on that day.

The Apostolic See, in revising our liturgical books in the 1940's, restored the ancient practice of our Church by restoring in our Ecclesiastical Calendar the celebration of the day of the death of St. Cyril on the 14th of February, and that of St. Methodius on April 6, with their common feast on the 11th of May.





*Church of St. Cyril, Kiev. 1140, rebuilt in 17th Cent.*

## Feast of St. John the Baptist

*“Amen, I say to you, there had not risen among them that are born of women a greater than John the Baptist.” (Matthew 11,11)*

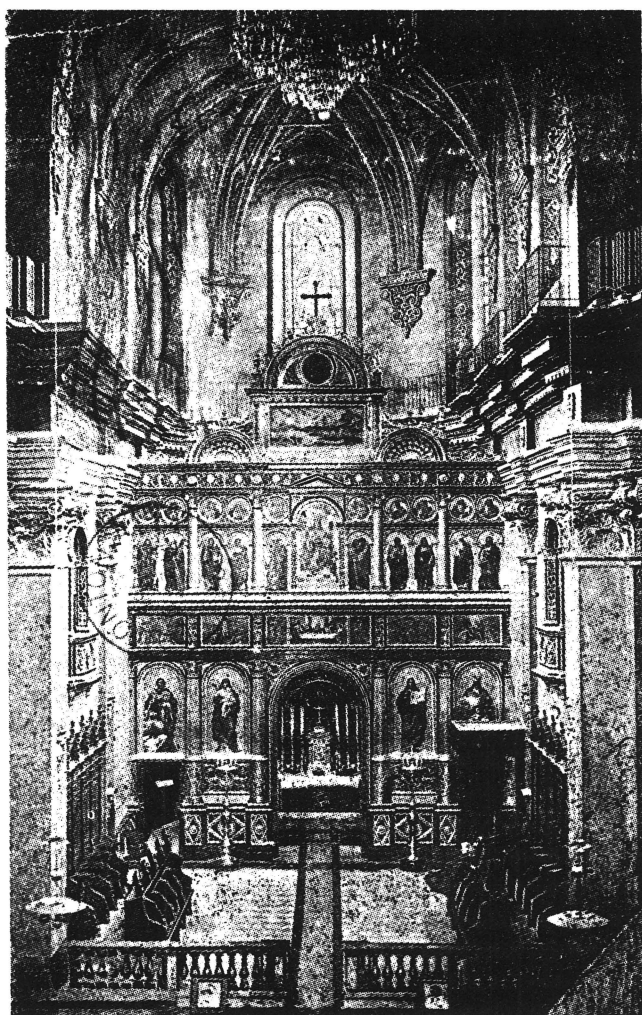
Among all the saints whom the Eastern Church venerates, St. John the Baptist holds a unique place. He alone, of all the Saints, except for the Mother of God, has a feast honoring his Conception, and another honoring his Nativity. The great esteem he enjoys in the Eastern Church is evident from the fact that during the Church Year as many as six feasts are celebrated in his honor: the feasts of his Conception, Nativity, Beheading, the First, Second and Third Finding of his Head, and the Synaxis following the feast of the Theophany. Let us examine his person and his cult in the Eastern Church.

### The Person of St. John the Baptist

Among all holy persons of the Old Testament, St. John the Baptist is especially outstanding, especially because he stands on the border of two testaments: the Old and the New. He closes the doors on the prophets and opens them to the Apostles. He is not only a prophet, but also a precursor of Christ, a baptizer and a martyr. John, already cleansed of original sin while still in his mother's womb, is the only person given the privilege of baptizing Him Whose coming the other prophets had foretold but did not live to see.

Before he was born, an angel of the Lord predicted to his father Zachary, “He shall be great before the Lord.” (Luke 1,15) And indeed, he was great for his holy life, authentic teaching, and heroic death. Jesus Christ himself acclaimed him as, “a burning and shining light.” (John 5,35)

The life of John the Baptist was an unbroken chain of sacrifice and penance. He preached to the people new doc-



*Interior of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in  
Peremysl, Ukraine*

trines never proclaimed before: a baptism of repentance, the nearness of the kingdom of God, the presence among them of Jesus, their Messiah and Saviour. John baptized Jesus in the river Jordan and later pointed him out as the "Lamb of God." (John 1,36)

St. John the Baptist fearlessly exposed and denounced all sin and scandal. He intrepidly addressed the proud Pharisees:

“You offspring of vipers! Who showed you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Luke 3,7) He does not fear to censure the sins and scandals of the royal house: “For John said to Herod: ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’” (Mark 6,18)

His holy life and teaching was crowned by his heroic death. He fell like a soldier at his post, giving up his life for the highest ideals: the service of God and his people. Therefore, he remains for all times an everlasting symbol of an heroic champion of all that is holy, courageous and sublime.

Our service in honor of the feast of his Nativity praises his singular virtues, heroic character, and unique role as forerunner of the Messiah, bestowing upon him various titles, such as: “mighty preacher of penance”, “desert-loving turtle dove”, “Lamp of light”, “star of the Sun of Justice”, “the greatest prophet”, “the great Forerunner”, “the greatest among the prophets”, “the universal apostle”, “true friend of Christ, the Bridegroom”, “illustrious star”, “God-marked voice”, “preacher of the Lamb of God and the Word”, “the end of the prophets and the beginning of the Apostles”, “earthly angel and heavenly man”, “the forerunner, star above all stars”. In the *Lytiya sticheras* of the feast of his Beheading we call out to him: “What shall we call you, O Prophet? An angel? An Apostle? A Martyr? For you lived as though bodiless like an angel; you taught all nations like an Apostle; and you were beheaded for the love of Christ like a Martyr.”

### **The Cult of St. John the Baptist in the Eastern Church**

In the East, the cult of St. John the Baptist is very ancient and popular. The veneration of his relics in various localities bears witness to this; other witnesses include the numerous icons revered by the faithful, the great number of churches erected in his honor, and the many feasts celebrated in his honor during the Church Year. We have:

#### **1. The Feast of his Conception — September 23**

This feast is associated with the feasts of the Annunciation and the Nativity of our Lord, for the conception of St. John was six months before the birth of Christ. The feast of the Conception seems to have originated at the end of the

fourth century, but not until the end of the seventh century do we have clear and universal evidence regarding it, in the Coptic Menologies, and the testimonies of St. Jerome and Venerable Bede. The Sinai Gospel of 715 does not include this feast. Although St. John Chrysostom has a sermon on the feast of John's Conception, it is of doubtful authenticity.



*By Michael Dmytrenko*

## **2. The Nativity of St. John the Baptist — June 24**

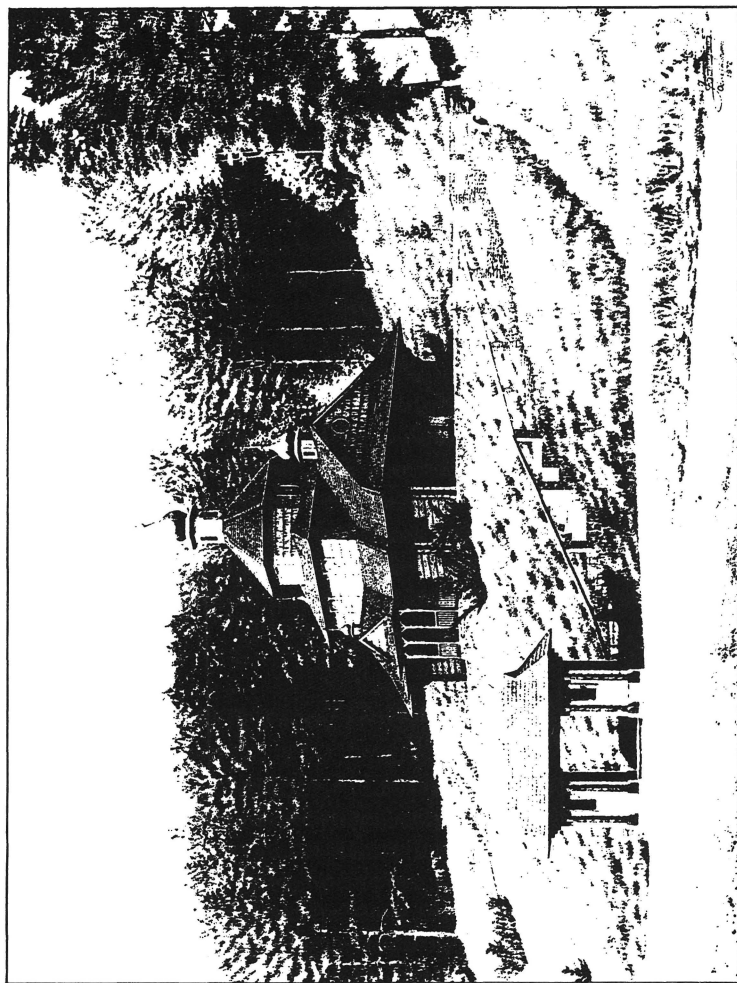
Of all the feasts of St. John the Baptist, that of his Nativity (June 24) is the greatest. This feast, like that of his Conception, was already known in the fourth century. We have sermons on this feast given by St. John Chrysostom, St. Ambrose

and St. Augustine. In his sermon for this day St. Augustine says: "Today we are celebrating the Nativity of St. John. This is an honor which no other saint enjoys. Throughout the entire Christian world, only two persons are honored in their nativity: our Lord Jesus Christ and St. John the Baptist." St. Augustine does not mention the feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God here, since this feast had not yet been instituted. In the West, we find the feast of the Nativity of St. John the Forerunner in the oldest calendar of the African Church from the fifth century.

At the time we celebrate the feast of the Nativity of St. John, in pre-Christian times our people had the custom of celebrating the feast of Kupalo. In regard to the festival of Kupalo in Ukraine, Professor S. Kylymnyk says: "The greatest, most exuberant festival, which ended the summer solstice cycle of the pre-Christian calendar festivals — was the festival of youth — of boys and girls — called "Kupalo or Kupajlo", which after the acceptance of Christianity was associated with the church festival of the Nativity of John the Baptist. Hence this feast bears the double name of "John Kupalo". The rites and songs associated with the festival "Kupalo", like the spring songs and dances, reach back to the earliest times, to pristine poetry and rituals in honor of the life-giver, the sun." (The Ukrainian Folk Year from the Historical Perspective, Vol. IV, p. 99)

### **3. The Feast of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist — August 29**

Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who ordered the massacre of the children of Bethlehem, dismissed his first wife and unlawfully cohabited with Herodias, the wife of his brother, Philip. St. John the Forerunner publicly rebuked Herod for the scandal he was giving; and for this he had to pay with his life. Herodias took revenge on him in a foul manner, by inducing Herod to have him beheaded. A pious legend relates that the severed head of John the Baptist even on the platter spoke, saying: "You cannot have your brother's wife." As a result Herodias was believed to have pierced John's tongue with a needle. Fearing, lest he rise from the dead and his head join his body, she buried the head on the premises of the palace.



*Saint John the Baptist Church, Hunter, N.Y.*

The disciple of St. John took his body and buried it in Sebaste, in Samaria. Testimony concerning this feast dates from the fifth century. The Missal of Pope Galasius (492-496) has the feast. St. Andrew of Crete composed the service for the Beheading of St. John (7c), along with St. John Damascene and the Patriarch, Germanus (8c). From the earliest times, on this day the Eastern Church has observed a strict fast in honor of the suffering and death of the saintly Forerunner.

#### **4. The First and Second Finding of His Head**

The Eastern Church celebrates the triple finding of the head of St. John the Baptist. We learn of its finding from the works of St. Cyprian Martyr, the church historians Sozomen, Nicephor, and others.

According to a venerable tradition, the righteous Joanna, wife of Chusa, who was the steward in Herod's palace, saw where Herodias had buried the head of St. John. She exhumed it at night, placed it in a vessel and hid it on the Mt. of Olives, near Jerusalem. Here the holy head lay hidden for over 300 years until the Christians discovered it while erecting a church on that site. This was the first finding of the head and numerous miracles were performed at this site. In the course of time, however, the location of the holy head seems to have been forgotten.

During the time of the Emperor Constantine the Great, two monks came from Syria to Jerusalem to venerate the holy places. St. John the Baptist appeared to them in a vision and showed them where his head lay hidden. They took it with them and, returning home, gave it to a potter from Emesa in Syria. For a long time the head was kept by this potter's family. Later, however, an Arian named Eustachius took the head and buried it in a cave. Some time later a monastery was built on this spot and St. John appeared in a vision to the superior of the monastery and again revealed the location of the head. This second finding of the head occurred in 452 A.D.

The historian, Sozomen, writes that at the command of the Emperor Marcianus the holy head was transferred to Constantinople. A single feast, on February 24, commemorates the first and second finding of the head of St. John the Baptist.



## **5. The Third Finding of the Head — May 25**

During the time of the Iconoclastic wars of the eighth century, the head of the Forerunner was taken from Constantinople and hidden in Comana in Asia Minor, where St. John Chrysostom died in exile. During the reign of Emperor Michael, the head was found for the third time in 857, and was again transferred to Constantinople with great solemnity. During the crusades, a Latin priest was alleged to have taken it.

## **6. The Synaxis of the Forerunner and Baptizer John**

The next day following the feast of the Theophany of the Lord, on the 7th of January, the Eastern Church celebrates the Synaxis of St. John the Baptist. On this day the faithful gather together to pay special veneration to St. John as the one privileged to baptize the Lord.

Here it may be appropriate to recall that on September 5 our Church observes the memory of the righteous Zachary and Elizabeth, the parents of St. John the Baptist.

By his heroic life St. John the Baptist teaches us that noble and holy ideals can only grow from love, dedication and sacrifice. Without the spirit of sacrifice, no service of God, no love of neighbor, no habits of virtue, no heroic act is possible.

The instruction which we find in our Slavonic Prologue for the feast of the Nativity of St. John the Forerunner, concludes with these words: "Therefore, brothers, let us too, enjoy this glorious feast of the Forerunner of the Lord and let us adorn ourselves with good deeds. Let us imitate this great prophet John, whom the Lord has set as an example before all who wish to be saved... We must not be Christian only in word, but we must also perform good deeds, in order to appear without reproach at the Last Judgment, when the servant cannot help the master, nor the father the son, nor the mother the daughter, nor brother his brother, but where only good works can lead us into eternal life, and only evil deeds can cast us in shame into the place of torment — from which place may the Lord God deliver us, to whom be glory now and forever."

# The Fast of the Holy Apostles

*“Who ever prays and fasts has two wings lighter than the wind itself.”  
(St. John Chrysostom)*

The holy Apostles prepared themselves for the coming of the Holy Spirit with prayer and fasting. They prayed and fasted much before they went out to preach the Gospel. After prayer and fasting they ordained new presbyters for apostolic work, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles: “And when they had ordained to them priests in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, in whom they believed.” (Acts, 14,22) St. John Chrysostom said that “the Apostles almost always fasted.” (Sermon 57 on St. Matthew)

So also holy Church from earliest times has prepared her faithful with prayer and fasting for the great feast of the Major Apostles, SS. Peter and Paul whose memory we celebrate on June 29, along with the Synaxis of the Twelve Apostles the following day. Because this fast occurs after the holy season of Pentecost, in ancient times it was sometimes called the fast of the Pentecost. Other titles are also given to this fast; it is known as the fast of the holy Apostles, the Apostolic Fast, the Fast of Peter (Peter's Fast) and the Summer Fast. Our people call it Petriwka (i.e., the Fast of Peter or Peter's Fast). When was the Fast of Peter instituted? How long did it last? What are its prescriptions?

## The Institution of the Fast of Peter

The fast of the holy Apostles is very ancient, dating back to the first centuries of Christianity. We have the testimony of St. Athanasius the Great, St. Ambrose of Milan, St. Leo the Great and Theodoret of Cyrrhus regarding it. The oldest testimony regarding the Petriwka fast is given to us by St.



*The Crucifixion (16th c.)*

Athanasius the Great (†373). In his letter to Emperor Constance, in speaking of the persecution by the Arians, he writes: "During the week following holy Pentecost, the people who observed the fast went out to the cemetery to pray." "The Lord so ordained it," says St. Ambrose (†397), "that as we have participated in his sufferings during the Forty Days, so we should also rejoice in his Resurrection during the season of Pentecost. We do not fast during the season of Pentecost, since our Lord Himself was present amongst us during those days... Christ's presence was like nourishing food for the

Christians. So too, during Pentecost, we feed on the Lord who is present among us. On the days following his ascension into heaven, however, we again fast." (Sermon 61)

St. Leo the Great (†461) says: "After the long feast of Pentecost, fasting is especially necessary to purify our thoughts and render us worthy to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit... Therefore, the salutary custom was established of fasting after the joyful days during which we celebrated the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, and the coming of the Holy Spirit."

The pilgrim Silvia Egeria in her Diary (fourth century) records that on the day following the feast of Pentecost, a period of fasting began. The Apostolic Constitutions, a work of the fourth century, prescribes: "After the feast of Pentecost, celebrate one week, then observe a fast, for justice demands rejoicing after the reception of the gifts of God and fasting after the body has been refreshed."

From the testimonies of the fourth century we ascertain that in Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch the Fast of the holy Apostles was connected with Pentecost and not with the feast of the Apostles SS. Peter and Paul. In the first centuries, after Pentecost there was one week of rejoicing, that is Privileged Days, followed by one week of fasting.

The canons of Nicephor, Patriarch of Constantinople (806-815), mention Peter's Fast. The Typicon of St. Theodore the Studite speaks of the Forty Days Fast of the holy Apostles. Simeon of Thessalonica (†1429) explains the purpose of this fast in this manner: "The Fast of the Apostles is justly established in their honor, for through them we have received numerous benefits and for us they are exemplars and teachers of the fast... For one week after the descent of the Holy Spirit, in accordance with the Apostolic Constitution composed by Clement, we celebrate, and then during the following week, we fast in honor of the Apostles."

### **The Duration of the Fast of Peter**

The Fast of Peter came into practice in the Church through custom rather than law. For this reason there was no uniformity for a long time, either in its observance or its duration. Some fasted twelve days, others six, still others four, and others only one day. Theodore Balsamon, Patriarch of An-

tioch (†1204), regarding the Fast of Peter, said: "All the faithful, that is the laity and the monks, are obliged to fast seven days and more, and whoever refuses to do so, let him be excommunicated from the Christian community."

From the work "On Three Forty Days Fasts", which is credited to a monk of the monastic community of Anastasius Sinaite (sixth-seventh centuries), we learn that the Fast of the holy Apostles lasted from the first Sunday after Pentecost to the feast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God. Later, however, the Fast of the Dormition was separated from it and the month of July was excluded from the Fast of Peter. Simeon of Thessalonica speaks of Peter's Fast as of one week's duration. The Syrian-Uniates reduced this fast to four days; the Syrian-Jacobites kept this fast along with the Greeks.

In our Church the Fast of the holy Apostles lasts from the Sunday of All Saints to the 29th of June, the feast of the Apostles SS. Peter and Paul. This fast may be of longer or shorter duration depending upon which day the Pasch (Easter) is celebrated. If the feast of Easter occurs sooner, then the Petriwka is longer; if Easter comes later, then the Petriwka is shorter. At its longest it could last six weeks, at its shortest, one week and one day. The duration of the Fast of Peter has remained the same as today since the beginning of Christianity in Ukraine.

### **Prescriptions of the Fast of Peter**

The Fast of Peter is somewhat more mitigated than the Great Fast before Easter. The Kievan Metropolitan George (1069-1072) in his "Rules" does not allow meat or dairy products to be eaten during the Petriwka. On Wednesday and Friday, he prescribes dry food, that is, bread and water or dry fruits. On Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday he permits fish twice a day and wine. In addition to this, he directs that one hundred prostrations (profound bows to the ground) be made daily, excepting Saturdays, Sundays and holy days. Since Metropolitan George was a Greek, we may assume that he prescribed for our Church the same practice on the Fast of Peter as prevailed in the Greek Church at that time.

The Synod of Zamost (1720) mentions that in our Church the Petriwka (Peter's Fast) lasted from the first Sunday after Pentecost, that is, from the Sunday of All Saints to the feast of

the Apostles SS. Peter and Paul. The Synod notes that laborers and villagers may be dispensed from the fast either partly or completely, since the fast occurs during the harvest season. During the Petriwka, the Synod of Lviv (1891) allows dairy products on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and meat on the other four days of the week; however, it imposes upon the laity the obligation of praying five "Our Father's" and five "Hail Mary's" before and after the noon day meal and supper; religious must recite Psalm 50.



*St. Peter and Blessed Virgin Mary, in Nakonechne (15 c.)*

## The Feast of the Apostles SS. Peter and Paul

*"Today a joyous feast has beamed forth  
to all nations: the most precious  
memory of the most wise and major  
Apostles Peter and Paul."  
(Stichera at the Aposticha of the  
Vespers service of the Feast)*

We owe to the Holy Apostles the priceless treasure of the Christian faith. They handed Christ's teachings down to us. From them, we received the Holy Gospel and the letters of the Apostles. They laid a firm foundation for the Church of Christ.

The servant of God Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky speaks beautifully of the significance that the holy Apostles have for us; he says: "The Apostles in the full sense of the word are our parents in the holy faith. Through their hands, God gave to mankind and to every nation within Christ's Church all that belongs to the divine apostolic tradition. In our ascetical life and our sermons we must not forget, therefore, that we have received everything from their hands. All that we have, we owe to their apostolic labors and their prayers... St. Paul, the Apostle, claims first place, for in his letters he has given to the Church a rich revelation of God, and a wealth of divine teachings... The Liturgical Year gives the Apostle St. Peter first place, assigning to him two days in the year, namely, January 16th — the feast of St. Peter in Chains and June 29." (On the Veneration of Saints, 1941)

On the 29th of June our Eastern Church celebrates with great solemnity the feast, which in our liturgical books is called: "The Holy Illustrious and Ever-praised Major Apostles, Peter and Paul." Both Apostles are distinguished for their character, their zealous apostolic labors and their great cult in holy Church.

## **The Apostle St. Peter**

Jesus Christ, having great plans for St. Peter at the beginning of his calling, changed the name Simon to the symbolic name of Peter-Cephas, which means rock, for he was to be the rock that will form the foundation of his Church. St. Peter was closely associated with Christ during his public life: He witnessed the glory of Christ on Mt. Tabor; in the name of all the Apostles, he professed the divinity of Christ; he was sent with St. John to prepare the Paschal Supper; He witnessed Christ's agony in the Garden of Olives; the temple tax was paid by Christ for Himself and for Peter.

After the Ascension of Christ, St. Peter became the head of the Apostles and the leader of the first Christian community in Jerusalem. Under his leadership, a new Apostle was elected to take the place of Judas. Peter convoked the first church Council in Jerusalem. St. John Chrysostom calls Peter "the firstborn lamb from the flock of the Good Shepherd."

The love of Christ was the chief motive of Peter's apostolic activity, labors and sacrifices. That love finally led him to suffer and die for the sake of his beloved Teacher. A pious tradition relates that he considered himself unworthy to die on the cross as Christ did, and therefore asked to be crucified upside down. This tradition is confirmed by Bishop Eusebius (†340) in his History of the Church and by St. John Chrysostom in a sermon on the Apostles SS. Peter and Paul, in which he says: "Rejoice, Peter, who died on the cross head downward." St. Peter died in Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero (54-68), between the years 64 and 67 A.D.; St. John Chrysostom following tradition gives June 29 as the day of his death.

## **St. Paul the Apostle**

St. Paul did not belong to the original group of the twelve apostles, but through his apostolic labors, his dedication, his superhuman sacrifices, and his sufferings in the service of Christ, he received the title, along with Peter, of the First Apostle. He is the only one of the Apostles who was highly educated and was by birth a Roman citizen. While Paul was on his way to Damascus, Christ Himself converted him in a miraculous manner and called him to be an Apostle. After his





*Basilica of St. Paul outside the walls of Rome*

conversion from being a persecutor of Christians, he became, in heart and soul, a zealous and courageous apostle of Christ. "Paul was a wolf," says St. Chrysostom, "But he became a lamb. He was a thorn, but he became a fruitful vine. From an enemy, he became a friend; from a weed, he became wholesome bread... The blasphemer became a theologian; the persecutor, a herald of good news; the tormentor — a leader; the traitor — a fellow-champion." (On the Holy Twelve Apostles)

In his apostolic work, St. Paul distinguished himself as a man of uncompromising character, remarkable strength of will and fervent spirit. For many years, he fearlessly preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ day and night. His unlimited love for Christ knew no obstacles, recognized no difficulties, and placed no limit to sacrifice. His love impelled him to undertake great missionary journeys and to establish new Churches; he was always ready to suffer and die for Christ.

The apostle of the Gentiles was not only an excellent preacher and a good organizer, but also an eminent theologian and writer. From him we have fourteen letters addressed to

various Churches or persons in which he clearly expounds the teachings of Christ. St. Paul gave up his life for Christ. According to tradition, he died by the sword in Rome on June 29, 65 or 67 A.D.

### **The Cult of SS. Peter and Paul**

Because of the great significance of these Apostles for holy Church, their cult began from the very moment of their death. Their tombs in Rome were well known and all Christians revered them. St. Jerome (†420) wrote: "When I was still a young man studying in Rome, I would go with my companions to the tombs of the Apostles and Martyrs." In the fourth century, their cult became universal in both the Eastern and the Western Churches. In Constantinople, Constantine the Great (†337) built a magnificent church in honor of the Twelve Apostles; he himself was later buried there.

The oldest church calendars already had the feast of these Apostles. Originally, not all the Churches observed their memory at the same time. The Calendar of Furius Philocalus, from the middle of the fourth century, has the commemoration of Peter and Paul on the 29th of June. The Syriac Calendar of the year 411, on the day of the 28th of December notes: "Peter and Paul, the Major Apostles." The Georgian Menology also places their feast on the 28th of December. The Calendar of Polemius Silvius (†455), Bishop of the city of Sitten in northern Italy, gives February 22, as the day of the death of Peter and Paul. The Antiochian menology of the fourth century places the feast of St. Peter on June 28 and that of St. Paul on June 29. The Nestorians celebrate the memory of both Apostles on the second Friday after the feast of the Theophany. We learn from a sermon of St. Sophronius of Jerusalem on SS. Peter and Paul that the fourth day after the Nativity of Christ in Jerusalem was dedicated to the two Apostles. Their feast in Rome in the fifth century, according to the testimony of Pope Leo I (†461), even had an eighth day post-feast.

Such distinguished Fathers of the Church as St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, St. Ambrose and others left us many beautiful sermons in honor of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul. St. John Chrysostom composed the largest number of sermons given in their honor. It may be appropriate to give



*Statue of St. Peter in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome*

a few excerpts here. "Rome has two illustrious eyes," he says, "they are the bodies of these Apostles (Peter and Paul). The brightness of the sky is due not so much to the sun diffusing its rays, as to these two lights of the city of Rome that illumine the ends of the universe with their radiance." (Works, Vol. 9,

p. 856) "O blessed duo," he says in another sermon, "who have faithfully caught souls all over the world! Peter — the beginning of the true faith, the greatest highpriest of the Church, the head of Christians, a treasure of heavenly powers, the apostle upon whom Christ Himself bestowed honor. Paul — the great Preacher of truth, the glory of the universe, a heavenly man and an earthly angel, splendor of the Church; great eagle that soared to heaven, lyre of the Holy Spirit...Paul and Peter — lights of the Church, who daily illumine the faithful; treasures of the Holy Spirit; enlighteners of the universe; vessels of grace; interpreters of the Holy Trinity; expounders of the divine word... pillars of the Church, great lamps of the universe." (Works, Vol. 8, pp. 615-616)

On the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, St. Ambrose taught: "This day, brothers, is well known to us and to the whole world, for today is the commemoration of SS. Peter and Paul. Their feast cannot be confined to one part of the world." St. Augustine, in one of his sermons in their honor, says: "Although we know from tradition that they did not die at the same time, nevertheless, we honor the memory of both on the same day, since St. Paul died a year later on the same day on which Peter was freed from the bonds of the body and was transferred to the world of the angels."

SS. Andrew of Crete, John Damascene, Cosmas of Maiuma and others composed the service for this feast on the basis of the sermons of St. John Chrysostom. The chief theme of the services for the feast of Peter and Paul consists of their significance for the Church of Christ, their zeal, their dedication, and sacrifice. In the aposticha of Small Vespers we read: "O Peter, foundation of the Apostles, rock of Christian faith, head of the Christians... O Paul, preacher of the gentiles, protector of Christians, lamp of the universe, great voice of Christ, the living God... O Peter, supreme disciple; Paul, the ideal of the Apostles." The stichera of the Great Vespers service extols them with these praises: "Terrible swords of the spirit, splendid ornaments of Rome, nourishers of the whole universe; spiritual tablets of the New Testament written by God... founders of the Church, true pillars, foundation and trumpets of the divine teachings of Christ, sharer in his sufferings... O Peter, rock and foundation of faith, and Paul, chosen vessel..."



At the sticheras of the Praises in the Matins service, holy Church calls upon all the faithful to glorify the Major Apostles and to take joyful part in their feast: "The solemn feast of the two Apostles has arrived, bringing salvation to all. Therefore, let us spiritually clap our hands and say to them: "Rejoice, O lights to those who are in darkness, O bright rays of the spiritual Sun. Rejoice, Peter and Paul, immovable foundation of divine teachings, friends of Christ, most precious vessels, come invisibly among us and impart supernatural gifts to those who celebrate your feast."

On June 30th, the day following the feast of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, the Eastern Church celebrates the memory of all the Apostles of Christ. In a sermon for this day, St. John Chrysostom praises the holy Apostles in these words: "You — are the unshakeable pillars of the true faith, the glory of the Church, the scepters of the kingdom... Here Peter teaches Rome; there, Paul preaches to the world; Andrew instructs the wise men of Hellas; Simon leads the barbarians to God; Thomas makes the Ethiopians white through baptism; Judea venerates the altar of James; Alexandria falls to the throne of Mark; Luke and Matthew write the Gospels; John, the Revealer of mysteries, in death as in life, has Ephesus under his protection; Bartholomew teaches the Lycaonians moderation. Philip, by a miracle saves Hierapolis. All unceasingly manifest everywhere good things for all. Their very dust, even in their graves, is immortal. Now they are servants, but later they shall sit as judges of the world." (Work, Vol. 8, p. 619)

## **SS. Anthony and Theodosius Pechersky**

*“O Anthony and Theodosius, you have  
shone forth in the land of Rus like  
two brilliant lights.”*

*(Stichera of the Lytiya)*

All the Saints that we venerate are dear and precious to us, for they are God's beloved ones and our intercessors before God. The dearest and most precious to us, however, are those saints who are of our own flesh and blood — saints of Ukrainian extraction. They are our honor and glory, they are our special intercessors before the throne of God; it is fitting that we give them our special love and veneration. “Special veneration should be given our Saints,” says the servant of God Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky, O.S.B.M., “that is, those who are the glory and ornament of our Church and Ukrainian nation. Perhaps it is coincidental that almost all of these feasts are celebrated in the month of July, so that this month can rightly be called the month of Ukrainian Saints. The cult of our Saints is significant for our Ukrainian nation in that they sustain and sanctify Christian love for the Fatherland.” (On the Veneration of Saints, 1941)

### **Founders of Ukrainian Monasticism**

In the first century of Christianity of Rus-Ukraine God sent our people two great ascetics of monastic life — SS. Anthony and Theodosius Pechersky. Their work, prayer, sacrifice and holiness left their indelible mark on the life of Ukrainian monasticism and the Church. We learn about their life and activities from our chronicles of that time, from the biography of Saint Theodosius, penned by the chronicler Nestor, and from the Pechersky Pateryk.



*Deesis (15th c.)*

### **Saint Anthony Pechersky**

St. Anthony came from Lubech in the district of Chernihiv. As a young man he went to Athos, received monastic tonsure and assumed the name Anthony. It was in God's plan that he serve his people in his native land. Thus one day his hegumen (superior) approached him and said: "Anthony, return to Rus so that there you may be of service and assistance to others, and may the blessing of the holy Mountain (Athos) be with you." Anthony obeyed the voice of the hegumen as though it were the voice of God. About the year 1051, he returned to the land of Rus and settled in a cave of the village of Berestiw, not far from Kiev, where previously Metropolitan Hilarion had lived as a hermit. Anthony's desire was to spend his life in prayer and solitude, keeping vigils and doing penance. Soon high-minded young men began coming to him, and he received them warmly. After some time, their number increased to twelve. Among them were the priest Nikon, Theodosius, and Barlaam son of a boyar (i.e., ancient aristocrat from the times of the Kievan State). St. Anthony longed for a solitary life — therefore, he went to another cave not far off. There he lived to a venerable old age. He fell asleep in the Lord in 1073, at the age of 90. Our Church commemorates him on the 10th of July.

### **Saint Theodosius Pechersky**

St. Theodosius was born in Vasylikiw near Kiev. He grew up in the city of Kursk, where his father was a government official. As a young man he longed to dedicate himself to monastic life but his mother prevented him. At the age of twenty he ran away from home to the city of Kiev, where he was accepted by Anthony and received the monastic tonsure at the hands of the priest Nikon. Theodosius was from the very start a good, zealous and exemplary monk. After the departure of venerable Anthony to another cave, the monks elected him as their superior. At the time he was scarcely thirty years of age. Under his leadership, the monastery at the cave began to grow rapidly, and before long the number of monks reached one hundred. Around the year 1062, Theodosius abandoned the cave together with his monks, and built a new church and monastery in 1073. He was not destined, however, to complete the construction of the church of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God, for after a



short illness, he left this world on May 3rd, 1074. At some time during his monastic life, Theodosius was ordained to the priesthood. We commemorate his falling asleep in the Lord on May 3rd, and the translation of his relics on August 14th.

### **Their Significance for our Church and Monasticism**

St. Anthony, while living in a cave near Kiev, laid the foundation for the Kievan-Pechersky monastery, thus, meriting the title of the first monk in the land of Rus. The Chronicler Nestor wrote of St. Anthony as having a great and illustrious reputation.

St. Theodosius is the actual founder of the Kievan-Pechersky monastery and organizer of Ukrainian cenobitic monasticism. The history of our Church justly calls him the father of Ukrainian monasticism. The Chronicler Nestor calls him "the second great luminary in the skies of Rus after our St. Anthony." He has the most beautiful words of praise for him as a monk, hegumen and organizer. He extols him as a "courageous man, of sublime life, marvellous virtue, outstanding miracles." As the final praise in his biography, Nestor extols St. Theodosius as "our teacher, guide and shepherd, great among the Fathers, an ancient luminary, builder and miracle-worker in the land of Rus." Finally, he turns to St. Theodosius with a very beautiful prayer and calls out to him: "Rejoice, enlightener of the land of Rus, for you are like the morning star, which appeared in the west, but shone forth in the east and illumined the entire land of Rus!... Rejoice, Father Theodosius, our praise and beauty! You are the boast of the Lavra and to the end of the universe its name has become famous." (Kievan Pateryk)

St. Theodosius, desiring to place Ukrainian monasticism on the traditional path of Eastern monasticism, takes the monastic and ecclesiastical Typicon of St. Theodore the Studite (†826) as its foundation. This is based upon the spirit and rules of St. Basil the Great (†379), which is the service of God and one's nation. St. Theodosius changed the monastic Rule of St. Theodosius the Studite somewhat and adapted it to the circumstances of our people. Hence, historians call it the Typicon of St. Theodosius Pechersky. Our other monasteries adopted this Rule, which with time also spread to Muscovy. The hermitical life which St. Anthony practiced was never popular in Ukraine.

The Kievan Pechersky monastery, having received good organization and discipline from St. Theodosius, quickly became the chief center and hearth of the religious, educational and cultural life of whole Rus-Ukraine.

The Ukrainian historian M. Chubatyj, in his work, "History of Christianity in Rus-Ukraine", wrote about the significance the Kievan-Pechersky monastery had for Ukraine: "The founding and the life of the Pechersky monastery was an epochal event in the development of Kievan Christianity, especially since it was not the hierarchy — which later was foreign and occupied high posts while the Ukrainians occupied only the lower posts — but the Pechersky monastery, and others after it, that formed the practical Christian life of Rus-Ukraine already from the middle of the eleventh century onward... Besides social work, the Pechersky monastery also engaged in cultural and educational activities. The monks occupied themselves with iconography, transcribing books, and the Pechersky monastery itself has a respectable library. But the most important merit of the Pechersky monastery was that it became the center for the writing of chronicles in the Land of Rus-Ukraine. From this center of the Rus State, other centers obtained copies and benefited from the experience of the Pechersky monks... The Pecherska Lavra, as the guardian of pure Christianity, immediately also became the guardian of Christian morals in the private and public life of Rus-Ukraine... The Pechersky monastery became the nursery of Christian patriotism in Rus-Ukraine and the center of opposition to Byzantine influence in Rus... In a word, the Pecherska Lavra in the second half of the eleventh century became the forge of that Christian-Ukrainian ideology which we have designated by the name Kievan Christianity." (Vol. I, pp. 362-365)

It may be noted here that in the history of the Kievan-Pechersky monastery, its superior was called an "hegumen" to the middle of the twelfth century, and from the year 1159 by virtue of a diploma from the Grand Prince Andrew Boholyubskij — he was called an "archimandrite". This same diploma gave the monastery the title of "lavra", and bestowed upon it the right of stauropeghia. In 1592, Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople bestowed upon the Pecherska Lavra the right of patriarchal stauropeghia. In 1786, the Empress Catherine II liquidated the autonomous government of

the Pecherska Lavra and subjected it to the jurisdiction of the Kievan metropolitans who became its archimandrites. For the government of the monastery the metropolitan appointed his vicar from the monastic community.

## **The Cult of SS. Anthony and Theodosius in Ukraine**

Already during their lifetime, St. Anthony, as well as St. Theodosius had the reputation of holy men and were held in high esteem not only by their own monks, but also by the princes, boyars and the citizens of Kiev.

Since no miracles were wrought at his grave, for a long time after his death St. Anthony was not entered into the register of Saints and therefore, did not have his own feast-day. One of the requirements for canonization in the Eastern Church is the working of miracles during life or after death. When, in the first half of the twelfth century, the Prologue developed — that is, the biographies of the Saints of the Rus Church, the memory of St. Anthony had not yet been recorded. However, the Pechersky Pateryk, written in the middle of the thirteenth century, calls venerable Anthony a Saint numerous times. Therefore, his being counted among the ranks of Saints and the institution of a feast in his honor occurred somewhere at the end of the twelfth or thirteenth century.

The cult of St. Theodosius began very soon after his death. During his lifetime he already had the gift of performing miracles and later, at his grave, miracles were also wrought. The translation of his relics in 1091 from the cave to the church of the Dormition of the Mother of God, which he had begun to build, also contributed much to the spread of his cult. In 1107, his feast was instituted for entire Rus. It was then also that his name was inscribed into the synodicon, that is the list of Saints, who are commemorated in the Lytiya service. During the Mongolian invasion the relics of St. Theodosius were concealed so that to this day no one knows where they are.

The service of his feast, which is celebrated on May 13, extols him as “a most brilliant star of the land of Rus”, “light and shepherd of the monks”, “the great Father”, “all illustrious luminary”, “glory of the ascetics”, “pillar of piety”, “model of virtue”. Here his prayer, fasting, penance, vigils,

miracles and works of mercy are extolled. In the sticheras of the Vespers service of his feast, holy Church calls upon the faithful to pay fitting homage of St. Theodosius, for "he was the teacher of the true faith for the Christ-loving princes, a strong defence for the nobility, a merciful father to orphans, a zealous protector of widows, a consoler of the afflicted, and a Treasure to the poor and destitute, ladder leading from the choir of monks to the heights of heaven; and to all those who hasten to him, an inexhaustible fountain of water — and he prays unceasingly for the salvation of our souls."

SS. Anthony and Theodosius are the glory of our Ukrainian monasticism, Church and nation. They are our constant intercessors before God. They have given us a very beautiful example of love, sacrifice and dedication to God, the Church and nation. The chronicler Nestor, in the biography of St. Theodosius, encourages us to imitate him in these words: "Therefore, brethren, let us too strive to be emulators and imitators of the life of our St. Father Theodosius and his disciples, which he sent before him to the Lord, so that we too may become worthy to hear that voice of the Lord and Creator: Come you blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matthew 25,34) (Pechersky Pateryk)



## St. Olga — Kievan Princess

*“With rejoicing we celebrate the glorious day of your holy death, O divinely-wise Olga, sending up a prayerful hymn to Christ, who crowned you with an incorruptible crown.”*

*(Canon of the feast of St. Olga)*

In the firmament of heaven of the Saints of the Church of Christ, the various Saints of the Ukrainian nation shine like stars. Among them, Princess Olga, whose memory we celebrate on July 11th, shines with the special brilliancy of holiness. Our chronicle “The Tale of Bygone Days” extols Olga in these words: “She is the forerunner of the Christian land, as the morning star before the sun and as the star before dawn... She was the first to leave the land of Rus to enter the kingdom of heaven; for this reason, the sons of Rus praise her as their Queen, for even after death she prays to God for the land of Rus.”

St. Olga is the first Christian to occupy the throne of the Grand Principedom of Kiev; the first enlightener and teacher of the Christian faith in Rus-Ukraine. Her baptism opened wide the road to the Christianization of our people. Here we shall consider the personality of St. Olga, the significance of her baptism and her cult among our people.

### Saint Olga — An Extraordinary Personality

St. Olga is one of the most illustrious women of the Kievan State. She was distinguished for her brilliant character, strong will, and singular wisdom in ruling our nation. She was a woman of great political skill. Our chronicle calls her “the most wise among all peoples.”

After the death of her husband, Prince Ihor (†945), Olga ruled the great nation for many long years with a firm hand in

the name of her young son Sviatoslav. "Not one of the rulers," says the historian, Natalia Polonska-Vasylenko, "was given as much attention by our chronicle as was Olga who, during two decades, wore an aureola of wisdom and feminine charm." (History of Ukraine, Vol. I, p. 101)

The great wisdom of St. Olga manifested itself in her acceptance of the Christian faith, through which she greatly enhanced her own authority and that of the nation in the eyes of Byzantium and the Christian rulers of Western Europe. "Princess Olga," says the historian, Mykola Chubatyj, "truly stands at the crossroads of the religious and cultural history of Rus-Ukraine." (History of Christianity in Rus-Ukraine, Vol. I, p. 101)

Our Church in the services honoring her feastday extols Olga in the following words: "Like a sun your glorious memory shone forth to us, O divinely-wise Olga, mother of the Rus princes, little one of Christ... You are our glory and praise, O divinely-wise Olga, for through you we have been delivered from the deceit of idolatry... You are powerful as a lioness, you are clothed with the power of the Holy Spirit... Pure Guardian of the law and Teacher of the Christian faith, we implore you to accept the praise of your unworthy servants, and pray to God for us who devoutly celebrate your memory."

### **The Baptism of St. Olga**

Princess St. Olga was led by various motives to accept the Christian faith, the first and foremost being the political, cultural and trade relations of Rus with Christian Byzantium and the other Christian nations of the West. Already during the time of Prince Oleh (†912), there were Varangian Christians in Kiev and Rus, who had their own church of St. Elias in Kiev during the time of Ihor. In this Church, the Christian warriors, while signing a peace-treaty with Byzantium in 944, took an oath of allegiance to Prince Ihor, the husband of Olga. Olga observed the honest and highly moral life of the Christians of Kiev. Not surprisingly, this awakened in her the desire to become a Christian. Professor Mykola Chubatyj speaks of the motive that induced Olga to accept the Christian faith: "There is no doubt that her innate intelligence led her to observe the world surrounding Rus, and that her numerous relationships with many Christians in Kiev, especially the



*By Michael Dmytrenko*

Varangians, gradually led her into the path of Christianity.”  
(Opus. cit., p. 174)

The date of the baptism of Olga to this day still remains unknown. Our chronicle says that Olga was baptized in Constantinople in 955. Greek sources describing in detail her visit to Constantinople in 955 and afterwards in 957, make no mention of her baptism. Such a significant event as the baptism of a ruler of Rus, they could scarcely have passed over in silence. The majority of historians are of the opinion that Olga was

baptized in Kiev in 954-955, and was already a Christian when she paid a visit to Constantinople with a large retinue.

The Christian faith had a deep influence on Olga's personal life and surroundings. As a Christian she began to perform many works of mercy. Some sources say that she allegedly built the church of St. Sophia in Kiev and also donated money towards the building of the church of the Holy Trinity in Pskov. In 959, she sent a delegation to the German King, Otto I. The Western chronicles report that she asked him for a bishop and priests.

Olga's efforts to convert her son, Sviatoslav, to the Christian faith failed. In the "Tale of Bygone Days" we read of this: "Olga living with her son, Sviatoslav, instructed him on the need to be baptized, but he showed no interest, nor did he want to hear about it... Olga frequently repeated: 'I, my son, have embraced God and I am happy; if you accept him you too will be happy.' He paid no attention to her, saying: 'How can I alone accept a new law? My companions will laugh at me.' She replied: 'If you submit to baptism, your companions will do the same.' But he refused to listen to his mother and continued with his pagan customs. Olga, nonetheless, loved her son Sviatoslav, and said: 'May God's will be done. If the Lord wants to have mercy on my family and the land of Rus, may he grant them the desire to convert to God, as God has granted this desire to me.' Speaking no more on the subject, she prayed for her son night and day, while raising him to manhood and maturity." Although she failed to convert her son, nevertheless, her influence upon him was great. "Olga achieved one thing," says the historian Mykola Chubatyj, "and that is that Sviatoslav was tolerant towards Christians and loyal to her as to his mother. Notwithstanding their differences of faith, he was a good and devoted son in other matters to the very end of her life. Regarding his failure to become a Christian, Olga, according to the chronicle, resigned herself completely to the will of God." (Opus. cit., p. 182)

There is no doubt that in becoming a Christian, Olga wished her people to accept the Christian faith also. Because of the conditions existing in the state at that time, however, she did not dare to undertake the general baptism of her subjects. This was later carried out by her grandson, St. Volodymyr the Great.

Regarding the genuine faith of Olga, her last will testifies



that she requested to be buried according to the Christian custom, and that no pagan funeral repast be held at her tomb. She fell asleep in the year 969, at the age of around 75.

Around the year 1000, St. Volodymyr the Great transferred the body of Olga to the newly-built Tithe Church during the time of Metropolitan Leontij (992-1008). Jacob the Monk, wrote that the coffin had a small window through which one could see the incorruptible body of Olga. During the Mongolian invasion the relics of Olga were hidden inside the Tithe Church. In 1635, Metropolitan Peter Mohyla, while rebuilding a small church on the ruins of the Tithe Church, found the relics of St. Olga, and they were kept there until the eighteenth century. Then, at the order of the Russian Holy Synod, they were again hidden and their place of concealment remains unknown.



*The Church of Tithes, Kiev*

### **The Cult of St. Olga Among Our People**

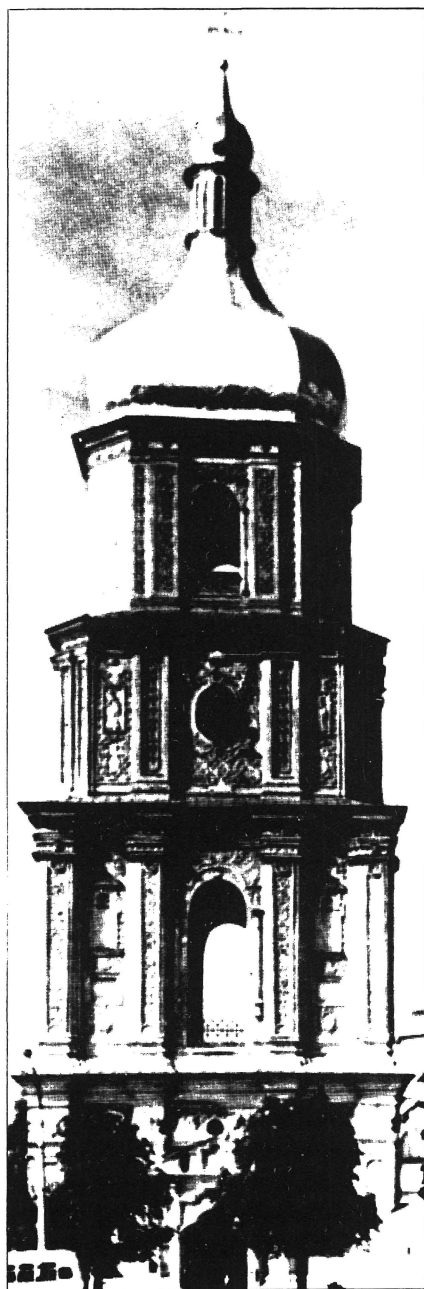
Because no miracles occurred at her tomb, and these are necessary for canonization, it was a long time after her death before she was canonized. Neither the Chronicler nor Jacob the Monk mention anything about commemorating St. Olga, though both do speak of her body as being incorruptible at the time her relics were translated during the reign of Volodymyr the Great.

The cult of St. Olga and the commemoration of her death already existed in our Church up to the Mongolian invasion. It appears that miracles also were wrought through her intercession, for she is listed in the register of the Saints somewhere in the twelfth century. We learn of the commemoration of Olga already in the pre-Mongolian period from three preserved lists of a Serbian Prologue of the thirteen-fourteenth century. These lists were transcribed from a Bulgarian text, which was a copy of our original. In those lists the biographies are given of the Saints of Rus of the Kievan province whose feasts were instituted before the Mongolian incursion. St. Olga is among those Saints listed and we find that a biography of her ends with these words: "O Olga, do not cease to pray to God for those who celebrate the day of your death." The said Serbian Prologue gives July 11 as the day of the death of Olga.

It is difficult to say with certainty whether there was a special service composed in her honor before the Mongolian invasion, for nothing has come down to us from that time. The present service in honor of her feast comes from the middle of the fifteenth century.

In 1557, Czar Ivan Vasylevych sent a diptych of the Grand and local princes of Rus (i.e. a book containing a list of names of the deceased) to Joasaph, the Patriarch of Constantinople. Here the name of Olga is not found among the princes and princesses who were to be commemorated as Saints at the divine services, but among those who were to be commemorated only in the Panachyda (requiem) service.

The personality of St. Olga as a ruler was neatly described by the historian, Natalia Polonska-Vasilenko. "Summing up the information about Olga," she says, "one must admit that her personality and reign deserve the greatest attention. The historian M. Hrushewskyj rightly characterized her: "She maintained the system of government with a firm and able hand, and did not permit it to weaken or collapse." She carried on diplomatic relations with the two most powerful empires of Europe, the representatives of Medieval culture. The baptism of Olga, which remained her private affair, gave reason for her to be called the "dawn before the sun", and for the contemporaries of her grandson Volodymyr to say that she was the "most wise among men". (Opus. cit., p. 105)



*The Bell Tower of St. Sophia's Cathedral, Kiev*

## Saint Volodymyr the Great

*"Come, all you faithful, let us sing  
a spiritual song and glorify Christ,  
who glorified with splendor the vener-  
able Prince Volodymyr the Great."  
(Canon in the Matins of the feast)*

Among the great and illustrious men of the Kievan State, St. Volodymyr the Great, like a sun, shines forth with immortal glory, majesty and merit. His memory is inscribed in the history of Rus-Ukraine in golden letters, not only as a powerful and wise ruler, but above all as the Baptizer, enlightener and zealous apostle of the Christian faith. The holy faith which he accepted in the Byzantine Rite became, in time, the heart and soul of our people and state, placing our nation on a solid moral foundation. It became the basis for our culture, customs and morality. Our faith has always provided great spiritual strength for our people, especially during times of national misfortune and destruction. For many long centuries they have lived by this faith and in it have found fortitude and vigor; by this same faith they continue to live today, and from it they receive new fervor even under the oppressive rule of atheistic communism. In this lies the very great merit of St. Volodymyr the Great for he gave to our people the priceless treasure of our holy faith. He will live forever in the hearts of the people as their Baptizer, Apostle and Saint.

### **Volodymyr the Great — Baptizer of Rus-Ukraine**

The Christian faith was not something foreign and unknown to Prince Volodymyr. Already during the time of Prince Ihor, there were Christians in Kiev who had their own church. His grandmother, St. Olga, who reared him, was a Christian. For various reasons St. Olga did not dare introduce the Christian faith into her country, but what she did not ac-



*By Michael Dmytrenko*

comply was carried out by her grandson, St. Volodymyr the Great. He not only accepted holy Baptism, but he also baptized our whole nation. By that act he placed our nation on the same level with the Christian nations of the East and West.

Prince Volodymyr decided to accept the holy faith of the Byzantine Rite because he was bound by close political, cultural and economic ties to the East, in particular to Byzantium and Bulgaria. He was convinced in his heart that the Christian faith of the Byzantine Rite best suited the

psychology and mentality of our people. Furthermore, the divine services and sacred books of the Byzantine Rite were written in a language understood by all the people. Volodymyr the Great, as our Chronicler reports, accepted the holy Sacrament of Baptism in the year 988, receiving Basil as his Christian name.

After accepting baptism and destroying the pagan idols, Prince Volodymyr, first of all, baptized his twelve young sons in a fountain at a place which to this day is called in Kiev by the name of Khreschatyk (Baptistry). At his command, the people of the capital city of Kiev and of the whole nation were baptized. "He ordered all his subjects throughout his dominions," says Metropolitan Hilarion, "to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, so that the name of the Holy Trinity would be glorified manifestly and loudly throughout all the cities, and so that everyone would become a Christian: the small and the great, the slave and the freedman, the young and the old, the boyars and the commoners, the rich and the poor. Not one person resisted his godfearing command. They were baptized, if not out of love, then out of fear of him who gave the command... finally, then our whole nation was united in glorifying Christ with the Father and the Holy Spirit... Volodymyr had converted from the erring path of idolatry not one person, and not the inhabitants of ten cities, but the people of his entire domain." (Metropolitan Makarij: History of the Rus Church, Vol. I, p. 5)

St. Volodymyr departed into eternity on July 15, 1015, and was buried in the chapel of St. Clement in the Tithe Church beside his wife Anne, who had died in 1011.

### **Volodymyr the Great — An Apostle of Faith**

Volodymyr the Great not only accepted the holy faith and baptized the entire nation, but also became its zealous apostle. His chief aim after the baptism of the nation was to obtain a church hierarchy and priests, to build churches and to promote Christian education. In the year 989, that is, the year after his baptism, he set about to build a church in honor of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God, called also the Tithe Church (because he designated a tenth of his princely income for the support of the church). This was the first of a whole series of churches that he built in Kiev and in all of

Rus. Metropolitan Hilarion in his "Word" said "Throughout the entire land of Rus he erected Christian churches and furnished them with ministers." Jacob the Monk, a contemporary of St. Theodosius Pechersky, in his Eulogy in honor of Prince Volodymyr says: "He adorned the entire land of Rus with holy churches."

The Christian faith had an especially beneficial influence on the heart, soul and character of Volodymyr. He was filled with a profound faith that stirred the depths of his soul; he lived and practiced this faith in his daily life. His biographers unanimously underscore the fact that the Christian faith completely changed his life. Jacob the Monk speaks of him thus: "The blessed Prince Volodymyr loved God with his whole heart and whole soul and cherished his commandments and observed them." Most evident in him was the love which manifests itself above all in the various works of mercy. Metropolitan Hilarion in his "Word" praises his works of mercy thus: "You gave alms to those who asked, you clothed the naked, nourished the hungry and gave drink to the thirsty, helped the sick, redeemed debtors, freed slaves." Jacob the Monk says: "I cannot describe all his alms. Not only in his house did he give alms, but also throughout the whole city; and not only in Kiev, but throughout the land of Rus."

The Nikon Chronicle testifies that Volodymyr "manifested many good works, truth, longsuffering patience, love, humility, humanity and mercy; his spirit burned like fire toward God and the divine faith, and he was deeply concerned about those who did not believe in the Lord Jesus."

"All contemporary sources agree," says Professor M. Chubatyj, "that after baptism, Volodymyr completely changed his past life and was totally occupied with evangelical works of mercy and love of neighbor. He used his riches not only for the needs of the state and the building of churches, but also to help the poor, the sick and widows." (History of Christianity in Rus-Ukraine, Vol. 1, p. 279)

Our Church, in her services for the feast of St. Volodymyr, bestowed upon him the most beautiful of praises. Here he is extolled as "another Constantine in word and deed", "a true preacher", "the root of orthodoxy", "the leader of piety and preacher of the faith", "a second Paul", "a destroyer of idols", "equal-to-the-Apostles", "brilliant light", "most glorious ambassador of Christ", "emulator of the Apostles",

“most blessed Father”, and “teacher from whom we learn of Christ”.

At the Aposticha in the Vespers service we cry out to him: “Rejoice, O glory of Rus; rejoice, ruler of the faithful; rejoice, O divine Volodymyr, our leader; rejoice, defence of the faith; rejoice, most glorious wonder of wonders; calm haven of those who seek shelter; rejoice, O holy rock of faith and interceder for those who praise and faithfully magnify you.”

### **The Cult of Volodymyr the Great**

Although during his lifetime Volodymyr the Great had the reputation of the Baptizer and Enlightener of Rus, his name was not placed among the list of the Saints for a long time, nor did he have his own feastday. The chief reason for this was that no miracles were performed at his grave. Jacob the Monk, in his Eulogy, defends him against the accusation that he did not work any miracles when he says: “Let us not wonder, my beloved, that he did not perform miracles after his death, for many saintly persons who did not perform miracles are now Saints.” And he quotes St. John Chrysostom as saying that “a holy man is recognized not by his miracles, but by his deeds.”

The unknown author of the “Eulogy in honor of Volodymyr”, from the middle of the twelfth century, complains of his contemporaries that Volodymyr not only did not have a feast commemorating his death, but not even prayers were offered up for him.”

The Ipatian Chronicle under the year 1229, when mentioning Volodymyr, calls him “the Great”, indicating that at this time he was not yet venerated as a Saint. Neither is the name Volodymyr mentioned in any of the synodicons (the lists of Saints) of the pre-Mongolian period.

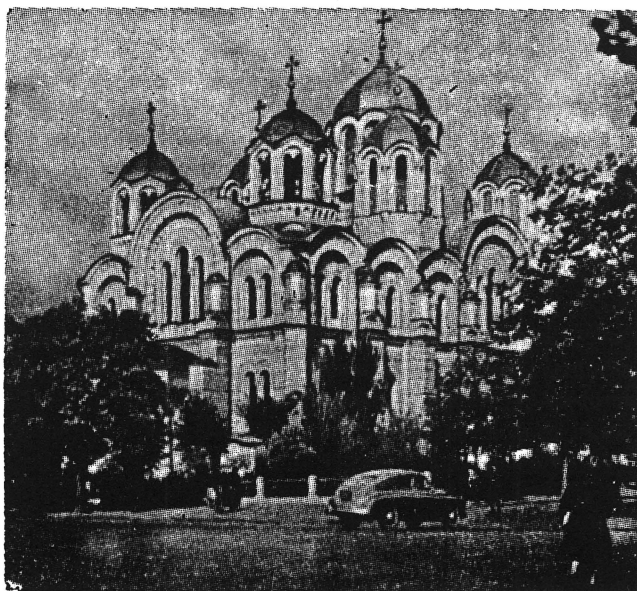
The commemoration of the day of Volodymyr’s death was instituted somewhere around 1240, not in Kiev but in Novhorod. The Novhorod Chronicle in the year 1240 says that on the 15th of July, that is, on the day of the death of Volodymyr, Prince Alexander Nevskyj gained an outstanding victory over the Swedes near the river Neva. If Volodymyr was already venerated as a Saint, the chronicler would certainly have mentioned him and ascribed this victory to his intercession. Instead, he writes that Prince Alexander defeated



the Swedes “through the power of St. Sophia and through the prayers of our Lady, the Mother of God and the ever-Virgin Mary, on the 15th day of the month of July, on the day of SS. Cyricus and Julitta, on the Sunday of the Council of the 630 holy Fathers, held in Chalcedon.”

It was on this occasion of the victory of Alexander Nevsky over the Swedes, on the day of the death of Volodymyr the Great, that his feastday was instituted in Novhorod on the 15th of July. In Novhorod nothing could have been said regarding miracles being performed at his grave, hence it must be accepted that his feastday was instituted not because he was a miracle-worker but because he was the Baptizer of Rus and equal to the Apostles. The Ipatian Chronicle under the year 1254 already calls Volodymyr a Saint. And the Lavrentian Chronicle under the year 1263 mentions his being commemorated as a Saint. In 1311 the archbishop of Novhorod, David, built a church in honor of St. Volodymyr the Great.

The relics of St. Volodymyr the Great lay hidden in a marble sarcophagus under the ruins of the Tithe Church from 1240 to the time of the Kievan Metropolitan, Peter Mohyla. In



*Cathedral of St. Volodymyr in Kiev*

1635, while rebuilding the Tithe Church, he found the relics of Volodymyr amidst its ruins. Metropolitan Peter Mohyla gave the head of St. Volodymyr to the Kievan-Pechersky church. The lower jaw, he sent as a gift to the muscovite Czar Michael who gave it over to the Dormition Cathedral in Moscow, and the arm bone, Peter Mohyla placed in the cathedral of St. Sophia in Kiev.

The historian M. Chubatyj gives us a very good characterization of the person of St. Volodymyr: "Volodymyr the Great," he says, "was perhaps the only person who found his way into popular oral tradition as an exceptional figure of a Ruler with two facets. Volodymyr is depicted as a strong, just ruler of the Rus State who, with the aid of his knights and heroes, preserved order in the State and did away with every crime and violation of rights and justice. He was the defender of the fatherland against foreign enemies. In the oral popular tradition another aspect of Volodymyr is manifested — that of one who is holy, pleasing to God and merciful, a friend of the poor. This other Volodymyr is the "Bright Sun", the father of the whole nation, who lived according to the spirit of the Gospel not in words but in deeds. He did away with destitution and poverty in his country. He was a social reformer not guided by the principle of hatred of one person toward the other nor by the theory of class-struggle without the foundation of Christian love. He was a social reformer who removed indigence, poverty, and want in his country for the sake of God and in the name of justice and evangelical brotherhood." (History of Christianity in Rus-Ukraine, Vol. I, p. 287)



# The Feast of the Transfiguration

*“We praise You, O Life-giver Christ, and we venerate the most glorious transfiguration of your most pure Body.” (Hymn of Praise in the Matins Service of the feast)*

On the 6th of August, our Church celebrates the feast of the glorious Transfiguration of the Lord. The purpose of this feast is to celebrate that glorious event in the life of Jesus Christ, the Transfiguration, which some of the holy Fathers call the second Theophany. The significance of this event is evident from the fact that three evangelists — Matthew, Mark and Luke — recorded it. Let us then examine the event of the transfiguration, the institution of this feast and the spirit of its service.

## The Event of the Transfiguration

The public career of Christ is now nearing its end, soon to be followed by his suffering and death. Although the Apostles believed that Jesus was the Messiah sent by God and although they expressed this faith through the lips of St. Peter, nevertheless, their faith was not as yet confirmed. Hence, Christ wished to strengthen it by an extraordinary revelation. Therefore, several days after predicting his own passion and death, Jesus took Peter, James and John with him, and went up to the mountain of Tabor; there, in prayer, he revealed to them a ray of his Divinity. St. Matthew, when writing about this miraculous transfiguration of Christ, says: “And he was transfigured before them. And his face shone as the sun, and his garments became white as snow.” (17,2) Near Christ, the Old Testament prophets, Moses and Elias, appeared and spoke with him about his death. The Apostle Peter, seized by the

brightness of Christ's glory, cried out: "Lord, it is good for us to be here." (17,4) As at the baptism in the Jordan, so too here a voice was heard from heaven saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (17,5) The Gospel says nothing of the place where the transfiguration took place. However, Christian tradition since the fourth century generally accepts the place as Mt. Tabor.

Why did Jesus Christ show his glory only to the above-mentioned disciples? According to the opinion of St. John Damascene, Christ took Peter with him so that he who publicly acknowledged Christ's Divinity, might hear the confirmation of his profession also from the Heavenly Father. The Lord took James up to Mt. Tabor because he was to be the first bishop of Jerusalem and the first of the Apostles to give up his life for Christ. Finally, the Saviour also made St. John a witness of his transfiguration, for he was his beloved disciple and a virgin. Having understood Christ's divinity on Mt. Tabor, John later wrote in his Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (1,1)

All three Apostles, witnesses of Christ's glory on Mt. Tabor, would later be witnesses of his agony in the Garden of Olives. So deeply impressed were they by Christ's transfiguration that in later years they wrote about it. In his second letter St. Peter strengthens his faith in Christ by recalling his glorious transfiguration, saying: "For we were eye-witnesses of his greatness. He received glory and praise from God the Father when that unique declaration came to him out of the majestic splendor: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased". We ourselves heard this said from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain." (II, 1,17-18) And the Evangelist John writes with enthusiasm in his Gospel: "And we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (1,14)

### **The Institution of the Feast**

The observance of this feast goes back to the fourth century. At that time, St. Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine the Great, built a church on Mt. Tabor in honor of the Lord's Transfiguration. At the end of the eleventh century, the Crusaders found several churches and monasteries on Mt.



*Cathedral of the Transfiguration in Kharkiv (1810-1816)*

Tabor. In the thirteenth century, however, the Mohammedans came and destroyed them. Cyril II, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, built a new church over the ruins of the ancient church in 1860. In 1923, a magnificent basilica in honor of the Transfiguration of our Lord was built on Mt. Tabor.

This feast began to be solemnly observed in the Eastern Church under the title "The Lord's Transfiguration" from the sixth century; in Western Syria, in the eighth century, it was called "The Feast of Tabor".

Originally, the feast of the Transfiguration was observed in February. However, since this joyful feast fell during the time of the Great Fast, its celebration was not in keeping with the spirit of fasting and penance. Therefore, it was transferred to the 6th of August. Why this day? The historian Eusebius and St. John Damascene are of the opinion that the Lord's Transfiguration took place forty days before the death of Christ. Thus holy Church, in keeping with this opinion, transferred this feast from the month of February to the 6th of August, because forty days later, September 14, is the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross — the commemoration of the passion and death of Christ.

From the East, the feast of the Transfiguration reached

the West somewhere around the seventh and eighth century. Here it came into practice slowly; it was observed at different times and even in the twelfth century was not universally kept. In 1457, Pope Callistus III extended this feast throughout the Western Church and commanded that it be observed on the 6th of August in memory of a victory over the Turks near Bilhorod. This victory took place on the 22nd of July, 1456, but news of the victory did not reach Rome until the 6th of August. The Armenians observe the Lord's Transfiguration on the 7th Sunday after the Descent of the Holy Spirit.

The feast of the Transfiguration is one of the twelve principal feasts of our Church, having a one day pre-feast and a seven day post-feast. The sticheras and canons of the feast were composed by St. John Damascene and Cosmas of Maiuma (8c).

This feast falls during that time when the fruits of the earth reach maturity. From the earliest times in the Eastern Church, on this day fruit is blessed in thanksgiving to God for the first-fruits of the earth. This custom was adopted by the Christian Church from the Old Testament which prescribed that fruit be brought to the Temple of the Lord. In the Book of Exodus we read: "You shall carry the first-fruits of the corn of your ground to the house of the Lord your God." (23,19) In the Book of Leviticus we read: "When you shall have entered the land which I shall give you, and shall reap your corn, you shall bring sheaves of ears, the first-fruits of your harvest to the priest." (23,10)

The custom of blessing the first-fruits in church was prescribed in the Canons of the Holy Apostles at the end of the third century. The Apostolic Constitutions of the fourth century have a prayer for the blessing of first-fruits. The local Synod of Carthage (318), in the forty-sixth rule gave prescriptions concerning the first-fruits that are brought to church. The Sixth Ecumenical Council of 691 spoke of the blessing of the first-fruits of grapes (the vine) and wheat. In the Typicons of the Great Church of Constantinople from the ninth-tenth century and in the Typicon of Evergetes Monastery of the tenth century no mention was made of the blessing of the vine, that is, grapes.

In Greece, in the month of August grapes and wheat, which are the more important fruits, reach their maturity. For

this reason, the custom of blessing the grapes and ears of wheat in church on the feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord prevailed there. In Rus-Ukraine, grapes of the vine were replaced by apples and other fruits.



### **The Spirit of the Services of the Feast**

Spiritual joy, admiration for the majesty of Christ, power, splendor, and the glorification of his Divinity radiate from the services of this feast.

The transfiguration of our Lord brings an unearthly joy to all the faithful. "All things today are filled with joy," we sing in the Matins service, "because Christ was transfigured before his disciples." And hand in hand with this joy goes great admiration for the power and glory of the transfigured Christ: "Before your death, O Lord," says a stichera in the Vespers service, "during your transfiguration, the mountain became a heaven, the cloud stretched out like a tent, and the Father gave witness to you. Peter, James and John were present there with you just as they were present during your arrest, so that seeing your miracles, they would not be frightened by your passion." At the Sessional Hymn in the Matins service we read: "O Jesus, you changed on Mt. Tabor and the bright cloud, assuming the form of a tent, covered the Apostles with your glory. And they, O eternal Saviour Jesus Christ God, fell

down upon the ground, for they could not bear the brightness of inaccessible glory in your face. You, who have shone forth with your light, enlighten our souls."

The main theme and true purpose of the feast of the Transfiguration is profoundly dogmatic: it is the profession and the glorification of Christ's Divinity. In the aposticha of the Matins service of the pre-feast we read: "Come, let us go forth up to the mountain and with faith we shall see the glorious Transfiguration of the Lord. Let us faithfully worship him and cry out: 'You alone are God, who became incarnate and deified human kind.'" In one of the Sticheras of the Vespers service we read: "He, 'I am Who am', who once spoke with Moses in symbols on Mt. Sinai — today on Mt. Tabor is transfigured before his disciples... conversing with Christ, Moses and Elias testified that He is the Lord of the living and the dead and that He is God who spoke in the past through the Law and Prophets." At the sticheras of Praises in the Matins service we praise him in this manner: "You who from all eternity are God — the Word, who is clothed in light as though with a robe, transfigured yourself before your disciples, and above the sun, you O Saviour, have shone forth." In Ode 6 of the canon we read: "The glorious Apostles recognized you as God on Mt. Tabor; O Christ, they were wrapt in wonder and they fell on their knees."

Having before her eyes the glory of the Divinity of Christ, holy Church calls upon her faithful to go forth in spirit to the mountain of Tabor and be witnesses to this transfiguration: "Come," says the stichera of Lytiya, "let us go to the mountain of the Lord, into the house of our God, and let us witness the glory of his Transfiguration, the glory as of the only-begotten Son of the Father. Let us receive light from light and being raised aloft in spirit, let us glorify the Trinity One Substance, forever."



## **The Fast of the Dormition — Spasiwka**

Christians of the first centuries always prepared themselves for great feasts with fasting and prayer. Gradually, shorter or longer fasts developed from this sacred practice. The Great Fast before the glorious feast of the Pasch occupies first place among the fasts. Soon before the feast of the Nativity, the fast of St. Philip came into practice. From a special cult in honor of SS. Peter and Paul, there arose a fast called Petriwka or Peter's Fast. And finally, came the most recent of the four yearly fasts, the Fast of the Dormition. With this fast we prepare ourselves for the greatest of all the Marian feasts — the holy Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God. In this manner, we imitate the fastings and prayers of the Most Pure Virgin Mary by which she prepared herself for her encounter with her Divine Son in her holy Dormition (falling asleep). The Fast of the Dormition is called by our people the Fast of the Mother of God or the Spasiwka. Spasiwka derives its name from the feast of "Spas" (Saviour) or Transfiguration which falls during the period of this fast. We shall consider the history of this fast, its duration, and its practice in the first centuries of Christian Rus-Ukraine.

### **History of the Fast of the Dormition**

The first mention made of the Fast of the Dormition occurs only in the ninth century. Just as the Petriwka and Pylypiwka, so too, this fast came into practice not by way of ecclesiastical legislation, but by way of custom. For this reason, many disputes arose in Greece regarding its existence, prescriptions, and duration.

The Evergetes Typicon of the eleventh century does not mention this fast, nor does the Typicon of the year 1136 of the Pantocrator Monastery in Constantinople. Similarly, the

Typicons of St. Theodore the Studite and St. Athanasius of Athos up to the fourteenth century do not speak of the Fast of the Dormition. Of the ancient typicons, the first to mention the Fast of the Dormition was the Typicon of the Greek Nicolo-Casulan Monastery of the twelfth century in Calabria, Italy. Here, on the first of August, there is this following note: "Patriarch of Constantinople, Nicholas I (895-925), concerning the Forty Days Fast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God says: 'We have another fast, called the fast of the Most Holy Mother of God, beginning on the first of August, which is mentioned by the Seventh Council of Nicea (920).'"

We find one earlier mention of the Fast of the Mother of God in the letter of Pope Nicholas I (858-867) to the Bulgarians. In this letter, he writes: "The holy Roman Church has from earliest times the custom of observing the following fasts: the Forty Days Fast before the Pasch, after Pentecost, before the Assumption of Mary the Mother of God, and also before the Nativity of our Lord." This letter is regarded by some to be of dubious authority.

In the work "On Three Forty Days Fasts", which is credited to the Antiochian Patriarch, Anastasius Sinaite (6c), mention is made of the Fast of the Dormition as a fast that was separated from the Fast of St. Peter, for originally it extended from the Sunday of All Saints to the feast of the Dormition; later the month of July was eliminated from the Fast of St. Peter.

The monks of Athos, around 1085, queried the Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael the Grammaricus about the various fasts and in particular about the Fast of the Dormition. His answer was: "In the month of August there was a fast at one time, but it was transferred so that it would not coincide with a pagan fast. Even now, however, many people fast at that time, in order to protect themselves from sicknesses."

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries the fast of the Dormition came to be observed in the Byzantine empire more and more frequently. In order to encourage the faithful to observe this fast, Archbishop Athanasius of Caesarea, Palestine (c.1090), published the results of his special research concerning this fast. In this he writes, "The holy Fathers and the holy patriarchs had handed down to us the fast before the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God, which is observed by all the cities and countries of the orthodox, especially the

blessed and great city of Constantinople, as well as the Great Church.” Finally, this author concludes that this fast was already practiced up to the time of Emperor Leo the Wise (886-911). The issue of the fast of the Dormition was the theme for discussion at the Council of Constantinople (1166) during the reign of Patriarch Luke Chrysobergas (1156-1169) and Emperor Emmanual Comnen (1143-1180). The Council approved the practice of this fast.

Nikon, a monk of the Black Mountain near Antioch, who lived in the second half of the eleventh century, says in regard to the Fast of the Dormition that those who keep it have no basis in antiquity; nor do those who observe it have the support of apostolic tradition, but rather have the support of a custom of very ancient origin.

### **Duration and Prescriptions of the Fast of the Dormition**

In the Greek Church, for a long time no uniformity existed in regard to the duration of the Peter and Philip Fasts, as well



*By Michael Dmytrenko*

as the Fast of the Dormition. Patriarch Balsamon (†1204) says that during his time some kept all three fasts — Peter's (Petriwka), Philip's (Pylypiwka) and Dormition (Spasiwka) — and that the duration was the same as today, while others observed only the Petriwka and Pylypiwka and did not even want to hear about the Fast of the Dormition. In his letters he defends the Fast of the Mother of God and orders that it be kept. He even appeals to the Council of Constantinople of 1166, which not only approved this fast but also determined its duration from the first to the 15th of August.

The Fast of the Dormition in ancient times was stricter than the Petriwka and the Pylypiwka, but was more mitigated than the Great Fast. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday of this fast, dry food — that is, bread, water and dried fruits were prescribed, and on Tuesday and Thursday cooked food was permitted but without oil. On Saturday and Sunday wine and oil were allowed, while on the day of the Transfiguration of the Lord, fish was also permitted.

The Synod of Lviv (1891) gives the same prescriptions for the three fasts — Petriwka, Pylypiwka, Spasiwka — namely, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday the Synod permits dairy products, while on the other days of the week it permits meat. On these four days, the clergy must recite Psalm 50 before the noonday meal and supper, and the faithful are obliged to recite five Our Father's and five O Mother of God, Virgin's (Hail Mary's).

### **The Fast of the Dormition in Rus-Ukraine**

As among the Greeks, so too, in our Church there was disagreement regarding the above-mentioned fasts. It is true that we have documents concerning these fasts from the second half of the eleventh century, but they are not clear and sometimes they contradict one another. The Kievan Metropolitan, George (1072), in his "Rules" for priests and laity, informs us that during his times all three fasts were kept. The Petriwka and Pylypiwka began at the same time as today, and the Fast of the Dormition was shortened by some. Metropolitan George commands that the Fast of the Mother of God be kept from the first to the 15th of August, but he does not mention anything about its prescriptions. However, the Studite Typicon of Patriarch Alexis, which St. Theodosius



*Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Pochaiv  
(1771 A.D.)*

Pechersky introduced in our Church during the time of Metropolitan George, speaks only of the Christmas fast and does not mention the fasts of St. Peter and Dormition. Precisely because this Typicon does not say anything about the Dormition fast, some not only shortened it, but did not observe it at all. Similarly, the three anonymous authors of the work "Words of Instruction" of the pre-Mongolian period mention only the Petriwka and Pylypiwka fasts, and say nothing of the Spasiwka.

Following the invasion of the Mongols, two documents relating to these three fasts have come down to us, namely:

the work of Metropolitan Maxim (1283-1305) and Metropolitan Photius (1408-1431). Metropolitan Maxim in his "Rules" for the entire Rus Church gives detailed prescriptions regarding the various fasts and their times. Regarding the three fasts, he writes: "The holy Councils gave us still another fast — the fast of the Apostles. When the feast of the holy Apostles falls on Wednesday or Friday, then the faithful are not permitted to eat meat, but must keep the holy day and eat fish... They also instituted a fast in the month of August before the feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God. No matter on what day the first of August falls, meat and fish are not allowed. Should the feast of the Most Holy Mother of God fall on Wednesday or Friday, then meat is not to be eaten; however, because it is the feast of the Most Holy Mother of God, fish may be eaten... And they instituted a forty days fast before the holy and great mystery of the Birth in the flesh of Our Lord Jesus Christ." Metropolitan Maxim does not mention the Great Fast, for there were no doubts about it or controversies over it. The "Rule" of Metropolitan Maxim which was sent out throughout the Rus Church had binding force on all; for almost a whole century there was no disagreement in this matter.

Metropolitan Photius in his circular letter to all the clergy exhorts the priests to teach the people to religiously observe the following fasts: the Great Fast, the Petriwka, the Fast of the Dormition and the Christmas fast.



*Assumption Church in Kievan Monastery*

# **The Feast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God**

*“We extol you, O Most Pure Mother of  
Christ our God, and we praise your  
all-glorious Dormition.”  
(Hymn of Praise of the Feast)*

The very ancient, universal and profound cult of the Most Holy Mother of God left a special mark, above all, in our Liturgical Year, which is not only rich in the variety of feasts honoring Mary, but begins and ends with her feasts. The Liturgical Year opens with the Nativity of the Mother of God, and closes with her Dormition (i.e., her falling asleep), which in our liturgical books is also called, “The Dormition of the Most Holy Glorious Lady our Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary”.

Although the feast of the Dormition reminds us of the sad occasion of death, nevertheless, it belongs to the joyful feasts.

The service of the feast is filled with hymns of joy and gladness. On this day holy Church rejoices because the Most Holy Mother of God was transferred body and soul from this earthly life to join her Son in eternal glory; because of her Dormition we have a powerful intercessor and protectress in heaven. It is fitting, therefore, that we now consider the institution of the feast of the wonderful Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God.

## **The Wonderful Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God**

The day of the death of the Most Holy Mother of God is called the Dormition (or falling asleep) in our Church, for her body did not know corruption after death, but together with her soul was taken up into heaven; hence, another name for

the feast is "the Assumption". We have no historical data to indicate how long the Mother of God remained on earth after the ascension of Christ into heaven, nor when, where, or how she died, for the Gospels say nothing of this. The foundation for the feast of the Dormition is to be found in a sacred tradition of the Church dating from apostolic times, apocryphal writings, the constant faith of the People of God, and the unanimous opinion of the holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church of the first thousand years of Christianity.

The earliest written tradition which speaks of the death of the Most Holy Mother of God is given in the work, which, in the Western Church, is known by the title "The Transition (i.e., death) of St. Mary"; in the East that same work has the title "Sermon of St. John the Theologian on the Dormition of the Mother of God". The author of this work is unknown. Some historians believe that this work dates from the end of the second or third century, while others place it at the end of the sixth century.

From this work, which we summarize here, we learn the details of the holy and wonderful Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God:

Three days before the death of Mary, the Archangel Gabriel appeared and announced to her from her Son, Jesus Christ, the time of her departure into eternity. On the day of her death, in a miraculous manner the Apostles gathered in Jerusalem, although they had been scattered in various countries of the then known world. St. Thomas was the only Apostle absent. The Mother of God expressed her wish to be buried in Gethsemane near her parents and her spouse, Joseph. Christ, in person, came accompanied by Angels and Saints to escort His Most Holy Mother to heaven. The Apostles, while singing holy hymns, carried the body of Mary to the grave where they remained keeping vigil for three days. On the third day, St. Thomas came from afar and desired very much to view for the last time the Most Pure Mother of God. When the grave was opened, her body was not there, only the funeral clothes in which the body had been wrapped. The Apostles then realized that Mary had been taken up body and soul into heaven.

From the beginning of the sixth century, it was believed by many that the tomb of the Most Holy Mother of God was to be found in the Church of the Dormition in Gethsemane,



while the Church on Mt. Sion was regarded as the site of her dormition. However, to this day historians cannot prove anything certain concerning the place of her death and burial. Some believe that she died in Jerusalem, others claim that she



*Icon of the Assumption of the Mother of God (1549)*

died in Ephesus where St. John was believed to have taken her. Even today a house in Ephesus is pointed out as the one where the Mother of God allegedly lived.

The liturgical cult of the Most Holy Mother of God began with the Council of Ephesus (431), which defined the dogma

of her Divine Motherhood. In the works of the holy Fathers prior to the fourth century, no mention is made about the Dormition of the Mother of God. St. Epiphany of Cyprus (†403) writes: "Let them examine the Scriptures and they will find no evidence there either on the death of Mary, nor on whether she died or not, nor whether she was buried or not buried. And when John went to Asia, nowhere is it mentioned that he took the Virgin with him."

It was not until after the fourth century that, on the basis of tradition, church writers began to write about the final moments in the life of the Most Holy Mother of God. These include St. Gregory of Tours (†594) in the West, and the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Modest (†634), who was the first to have a sermon on the Dormition, St. Andrew of Crete (†712), and St. John Damascene (†749) in the East.

Toward the end of the seventh century, and at the beginning of the eighth century, church writers began to direct their attention not only to Mary's wonderful Dormition, but also to her ascension into heaven body and soul. The most interesting and most substantial testimony on the Dormition is given by St. John Damascene. In his second sermon on the Dormition, he appeals to another work, not well known to us, "The History of Euthemius" and says, that after Pulcheria, the wife of Emperor Marcian (450-457), had built a church in honor of the Most Holy Mother of God at Blachernae, a suburb of Constantinople, she wanted to place the body of the Most Holy Mother of God there. In this matter she turned to the Patriarch of Jerusalem Juvenal (†458), who at the time was at the Council of Chalcedon (451). He related to her the tradition that, after Mary's grave had been opened for St. Thomas, her body was not found there. Instead of the body, Juvenal sent to Pulcheria the funeral clothes of the Most Holy Mother of God. The last writer in the East who collected all the traditions concerning the Dormition was the Byzantine Church writer, Nicephor Callistus Ksantopul (†1335). He also wrote the synaxaries for the Triodion and of the Saints for the whole year.

St. John Damascene clearly believed in the assumption of the Most Holy Mother of God body and soul into heaven. In one of his sermons on the Dormition he says: "It was fitting that He, who preserved Mary's virginity after his birth, should also preserve her body incorrupt after death. It is fitting that



*Our Lady of Krasiw (15th c.)*

She, who carried in her arms the Creator as a Child, dwell in the heavenly mansions. It is fitting, that she, who beheld her Son on the cross while her heart was pierced with a sword of grief she did not know at the Nativity, should now look upon Him as He sits with the Father. It is fitting that the Mother of God possess all that her Son possesses and that all creatures venerate her as the Mother and maidservant of God."

The whole tradition and faith of the Church of the first centuries regarding Mary's wonderful Dormition and Assumption body and soul into the heaven is reflected in our service for the feast of the Dormition. "Death and the tomb could not hold you, O Mother of God," says the Kontakion of the feast, "who are our ever-vigilant intercessor in prayer and our unfailing hope in pleading for us. For He Who dwelt in the ever-Virgin womb transferred the Mother of Life to life." In the Lytiya stichera we sing: "Come, O gathering of those who love her feast, come and let us form a choir. Come, let us fill the Church with hymns of praise at the falling asleep of the ark of God. For today heaven has opened its bosom, as it receives the woman who gave birth to the One whom nothing can contain. Today the earth, as it gives back to heaven the Source of Life, is robed in blessing and majesty. The angels join the crowd of Apostles and gaze in awe at her who bore the Cause of Life." Holy Church rejoices at the Dormition of the Mother of God, for she intercedes for us in heaven. In the troparion of the Feast we read: "O Mother of God, in giving birth to Christ you have preserved your virginity, and after the assumption you did not abandon the earth; you have passed from life, being

the Mother of Life; and through your prayers you deliver our souls from death." In the first stichera in the Vespers service the Church exclaims: "O strange miracle! the Source of Life is laid in a tomb, and the grave becomes a ladder to heaven. Rejoice Gethsemane, holy chamber of the Mother of God! O faithful, let us all cry out with Gabriel: O Full of Grace, rejoice! the Lord is with you, and because of you he bestows great mercy upon the world."

### **Institution of the Feast**

The feast of the Dormition is one of the oldest of Marian feasts. It began in Jerusalem shortly after the Council of Ephesus. The original celebration in honor of the Dormition under the influence of the Council of Ephesus emphasized the privilege of her Divine Motherhood, and hence, it was called "The Feast of Mary, the Mother of God." In one of the eulogies in honor of St. Theodosius the Great (†529), there is mention that on the 15th of August, the Palestinian monks annually celebrated with great solemnity "The Memory of the Mother of God", that is, the memory of her Dormition. In Syria, in the fifth century, this feast was called "The Memory of the Blessed One".

In the sixth century this feast received its present day title: "The Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God". In the first centuries not all the Churches of the East celebrated the Dormition at the same time. The Patriarch of Alexandria, Theodosius (†567), prescribed that the Dormition be kept on the 6th of January, and the feast of her Assumption on the 9th of August. The Ethiopian Church even today celebrates the "Dormition of the Body of our Pure, Holy, Glorious Mother of God, the Virgin Mary" on the 6th of January, and the "Ascension of the Body of our Virgin Mary, the Mother of God into Heaven" on the 9th of August. The Armenians keep the Dormition on the Sunday between the 12th and the 18th of August. Other Churches celebrate it on the 18th of August.

Emperor Mauricius (582-602) extended this feast throughout the entire Byzantine empire and commanded that it be celebrated on the 15th of August, for on that day he gained a brilliant victory over the Persians.

The feast of the Dormition appeared in the West under the influence of the East, at a somewhat later date. It was ac-



*The Church of the Assumption in the Kievan Cave Monastery (11th c.)*

cepted in Rome under Pope Sergius I (687-701), and from Rome it passed over to the other countries of Europe. Just as in the East, so too here, the various Churches celebrated it at different times. Rome, following the East, celebrated the Dormition on 15th of August; France, on the 18th of January; Spain, after the Council of Toledo (656), on the 18th of December. The Roman menology of the seventh century, which is attributed to St. Jerome, under the 18th of January makes the following note: "The Death of the Most Pure Virgin Mary", and on the 14th of August: "Assumption into Heaven", while the Roman calendar of the eighth century has already only one feast of the Dormition, and that is on the 15th of August.

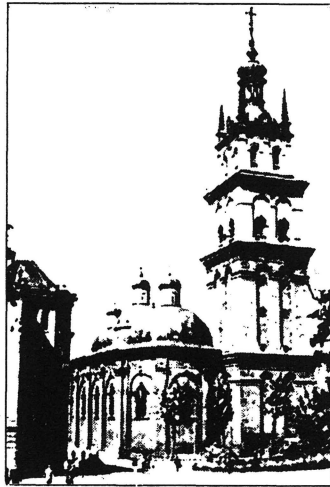
In the Western Church, beginning with the First Vatican Council (1869-1870), there has always been an attempt to establish as a dogma the belief of the Church in the miraculous Dormition and Assumption of the Most Pure Mother of God. Pius XII (†1958) took this task upon himself. After obtaining the opinions of all the bishops of the Catholic Church, in his Apostolic Constitution "Most merciful God" of the first of November 1950, he solemnly proclaimed to the whole world, "By the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and our own authority, we proclaim, declare and define as a truth revealed by God, that the Immaculate Mother of God, the Ever-Virgin Mary, having ended the course of her life on earth, was taken body and soul into heavenly glory."

In our Church two other feasts are associated with the Dormition: The Placing of the venerable Robe of the Most Holy Lady our Mother of God in Blachernae — on the 2nd of July, and the Placing of the venerable Cincture of the Most Holy Lady our Mother of God in Chalcopratia — on the 31st of August.

Some ancient Typicons prescribe the blessing of fruit of the vine (grapes), not on the feast of the Transfiguration, but on the feast of the Dormition. In the Greek Nicolo-Casulan Typicon of the twelfth-thirteenth century, we read: "Let it be known that, on the feast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God, the 15th of August, grapes are blessed and eaten in church after the Divine Liturgy according to an ancient tradition." The Typicon of Sinai of the year 1214 contains the same prescription. Similarly, the Typicons of the

Lavra of St. Athanasius on Athos prescribes the blessing of grapes on the 15th of August.

We have the custom of blessing flowers on the feast of the Dormition. The Typicon of Father I. Dolnytskyj says: "Wherever the custom prevails of blessing flowers, let it be done after the Prayer behind the Ambo or after the Dismissal Prayer of the Divine Liturgy.



*Assumption Church in Lviv*

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 Zenon of Verona, 295  
 Zhochowski C., Metropolitan, 196  
 Zwingli, 189

## Corrections

- P. 30 — The illustration is:  
*The Blessed Mother with Sts. Anthony and Theodosius Pechersky (1288), not The Deesis.*  
 P. 33 — Third line from the top is incomplete; should be:  
 conqueror and *Teacher*.  
 P. 46 — Sixth line from the top is incomplete; should be:  
 our daily *lives*.  
 P. 265 — The word *Kviv* in the caption below the illustration  
 should be *Lviv*.  
 P. 319 — The caption should read: *Jesus Christ by*  
*Frank Wysochanski, not Stoning of St. Stephen.*

Illustrations were also taken from *The Ukrainian Icon of the 12th to 18th Centuries*, by Sviatoslav Hordynsky, published by Providence Association, Philadelphia, 1973.

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